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THE BANDITS

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BY
PANAÏT ISTRATI

Kyra Kyralina
1926

Uncle Anghel
1927

The Bandits
1929

THE
BANDITS

[LES HAÏDOUCS]

BY PANAIT ISTRATI

TRANSLATED

FROM THE FRENCH BY

WILLIAM A. DRAKE



NEW YORK
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*Having with this volume terminated
the first part of
"The Narratives of Adrien Zograffi,"
I dedicate it to the two men
who, without themselves knowing it,
gave me the incentive to write—
the French novelist,
ROMAIN ROLLAND,
and the Roumanian cobbler,
GHEORGHÉ IONESCU*

N I C E , 1926

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FOREWORD

The latter portion of the present work, which in the French edition was published as a separate book, was to have been the final volume of The Bandits, and the last but one of The Narratives of Adrien Zo-graffi. Still another book, entitled Groza, was to have constituted the last of the series, according to my original plan. I had even the intention of having them appear simultaneously, when an accident disarranged the logical culmination of The Bandits.

I must acquaint my readers with the particulars of this accident.

During the summer of 1925, after an absence of ten years, I had gone to revisit my native country, Roumania—now become, by the aid of France and that of other noble and generous nations, "Great Roumania." What I saw, learned, and felt during the two months of my sojourn between the Dniester and the Theiss convinced me that I was merely splitting water with an

axe. In fact, at the very moment when I was striving to describe the atrocities committed by the Greeks and the Turks in the epoch of the Occupation, the Roumanian Government was engaged in exterminating, with a ferocity which we cannot but term mediæval, the population of this "Great Roumania," which was no longer actually occupied by any foreign power. My tales of the rapes and massacres that took place almost a century ago, paled before the shootings of children, old men, women, and infants, whom of late the officers of the regular army—declared "national heroes" by the Roumanian Senate—pursued and destroyed in the plains of Bessarabia.

I returned to France, stricken at heart; but I swore to myself: I shall proclaim to the Occident the crimes against humanity which are practised by these executioners of the Roumanian people! I swore to think no more of Art, until I had avenged the victims who cried from their tombs: "Before art, a little pity for us!"

I found a gracious reception in several organs of the second order, and with the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*. I wrote two or three articles and, one evening, made an address at the *Salle des Sociétés Sa-*

vantes. *That was all. But I was permitted merely to skim the surface of the horror, and certain well-informed persons, who were acquainted with the formidable mass of documentary evidence which I wished to deliver to the "powerful" press, assured me that this same press preferred "more important news" to my contributions.*

Then, my love for my work diminished. I cut short what I had to say concerning the past, and I confess that I wrote this volume with scant enthusiasm.

Besides, to what purpose would enthusiasm serve? To amuse my readers? I am not made for that! To move them? Yes, I should like to do that; but I have perceived too well that the Occident grows most tender in the presence of the strings of pearls and the "superb solitaires" which Americans lose in the cabarets of Montmartre; in the presence of master thieves and pandering Messiahs; in the presence of men before whom it breaks its back because they earn a hundred thousand francs a minute; in the presence of everything that does not disturb the digestion of the masters of the world.

It is this that I henceforth have to say!

And now, if there are among my readers any who

no longer wish to follow my words, let them know that I do not ask them to feed me, and that I am alike indifferent to their wrath.

PANAÏT ISTRATI

THE BANDITS

THE RETREAT TO THE DARK VALLEY

"**H**ERE are the haïdoucs, Adrien," said Jeremy. "To begin with, here is Floritchica, our leader, who, in order to give herself greater feminine dignity, has dropped the diminutive and now calls herself 'Floarea Codrilor,'¹ Captain of the Haïdoucs.'"

"You wish," she began, "to lay upon my womanly shoulders the weight of a heavy responsibility, and upon my head, the price of its failure. Very well, then; I accept them both. . . . But in that case, it is necessary that we should know one another. You must tell me everything about yourselves. First, however, I shall tell you my own story. . . ."

For several minutes she did not speak to us, but strode quickly back and forth, her face clouded with anxiety.

It was hardly six weeks since the death of Cosma, and only a day since our arrival in the Dark Valley: and on this fog-drenched morning in mid-October, the words of our captain fell sombre and heavy; sombre and heavy indeed, like the fall of Cosma, like the slaughter of half his company with their vataf² leading them; sombre and heavy, even as our solitude in the heart of these lofty mountains, so little known and so seldom visited.

The fourteen men who had chosen the New Life were lying on the ground, wrapped in their fur cojocs, in happy, animal repose amid the disorder of their arms and baggage. Near by stood their horses, peace-

¹ Flower of the briar.

² The second-in-command.

fully grazing. The general staff (comprising Spilca, the mysterious monk; Movila, the new vataf; Ely, and myself) had been assembled for the purpose of determining some definite program for our New Life. Thus, the abrupt and unexpected demand of our captain surprised us. Eighteen pairs of eyes were fastened upon this stout-hearted woman, so rich in experience and so swift in action.

In feverish excitement, she strode up and down the length of Bear Cave, of which we had taken possession the evening before, and which was to be our refuge for the winter. She wore the conventional kashmir turban; a fox fur was thrown round her shoulders, and her wide pantaloons—the native chalvar—gave her full freedom for her agile movements. The vataf rose and put the tcheaoun on the fire, in order to prepare Turkish coffee—a luxury introduced by Floarea, and which she considered indispensable in any life, even though that life were savage.

She continued to walk back and forth, maintaining her silence, either because she had need to recruit her own ideas, or because she wished to give us time to assemble ours. Meanwhile, she gazed abstractedly about her—now at her scanty following, now at the hillsides obscured by the mist. Her long, delicately modelled face was somewhat pale; her eyes were heavily circled, and her lips, which at other times were like twin cherries, were dry and chapped by the cold. The men followed her movements with glances which were both covetous and respectful at the same time. Cosma's successor appeared to them as a being indeed full of mystery, but still more instinct of nobility. It was well known that she had travelled far and wide, that she was familiar with every particular of the country from

its one border to the other, and that she had vowed war—a war without mercy or relenting—against the executioners who ruled it.

This much was pleasing to the men. Still, they could not forget that Floarea was a woman. It was true, to be sure, that she wore chalvars. Nevertheless, she remained a woman. And, moreover, a beautiful woman. What was she to do with her beauty amid the desolation of these Bear Mountains? Yet, since Cosma was gone, there was no man in the company who could ride as well as she; none who could surpass her in endurance under the burdens of privation and fatigue, nor any one more staunch and audacious than she when peril hung upon a swift decision. Standing before the corpse of the man who had been her first and only lover, she had declared:

“From this time on, I shall be Floarea Codrilor, the beloved of the forest, the friend of free men, and, with your aid, the chastisement of the unjust!”

Movila, the vataf, brought her the felidjane full of steaming coffee and offered her his tobacco pouch, at the sight of which her black eyes flamed. Some one brought her a stool. Seating herself, she drank and smoked. Then she again took up her last sentence.

*THE NARRATIVE
OF FLOAREA CODRILOR*

FIRST, I shall tell you my own story.

I am a deceitful woman, who, however, knows how to be sincere, when she so chooses and when her companion is worthy of the pains. I never had a father. I came from the flowers,¹ as they say. My mother was a shepherdess from her childhood until her death; and through all her life she had no knowledge of anything except the fields, the winds, her flute, and her dog; of the sheep which she guarded, and the scab which she strove to destroy. Save only the scab, which she had to treat with her own hands, everything in her universe was pleasing to her. But, alas! life is never made up of happiness alone. The poor woman suffered one misfortune, only one, which nevertheless influenced her whole life. As a child, while playing, she lost an eye.

Usually, we forget our infirmities, especially those which come to us in childhood. My mother never passed a day without experiencing some painful recollection of her misfortune.

She did not weep, but never again could she laugh with a carefree heart. She forgot the world—the world, which never knew anything either of her sorrow or of her quarrel with life. She found her consolation among the beings and the things of which I have spoken.

Until she had reached the age of thirty, she had peace. Nevertheless, she was disturbed by an obscure torment, a vague disquietude, an inexplicable fever.

¹ That is, she was a love-child.

My mother fancied that a brisk rub-down with snow was all that was necessary to assuage her discomfort. In summer, when there was no snow, she would roll herself down the hillside, as if she were the trunk of a tree. But these practices only resulted in an increase of her misery—until, one day, when she was thus careening down the hillside, she rolled full into a shepherd. And that was her salvation.

But salvation was not yet peace. For, like my mother, this devil of a shepherd, who had a head like an Astrakhan sheep, also bore an affliction. It was not that he had lost an eye or a hand. On the contrary, he was not only whole—he was more than whole. He ought to have been the master of a harem, rather than the warder of a flock of sheep. Worse still, his affliction was aggravated by the circumstance that he was inordinately haughty and discriminating in his choice of cures. My mother, without further introduction, lived with this fellow in the most comradely fashion until, one fine April day, piqued by the aggressive spring, he complained to the one-eyed shepherdess of the ascetic life which had fallen to his lot. The one-eyed shepherdess, without pausing in her knitting, interrogated him as a good friend concerning his love-affairs.

"Can you no longer approach Sultana, the cartwright's daughter?"

"I could, but she has pains in her stomach. . . ."

"And Mary—you used to be crazy about her!"

"She can hardly stand up any more. . . ."

"Then why don't you try your luck with Katherine? She is for ever fairly devouring you with her eyes!"

"Yes, she devours me, right enough, but she is afraid. . . ."

"You know, don't you, that foreign song which goes:

*La femme est une chienne toujours prête à l'amour,
Et l'homme est une brute facile à exciter. . . .*

Surely, it ought to be very easy for you to find as much as your heart desires!"

At this the shepherd became angry.

"Why do you call me a brute? Because I love women? What should I love, then? The gullet of a pike? The skin of a hedgehog? Or perhaps you think I might do better to walk, all naked, among thorn bushes as high as my chin? Or rub myself down with snow, like you? Or risk having a stick implanted in my belly by rolling down the hills, as you do without risking anything?"

And this is the manner in which an important event came to pass in the momentous hour which followed the anger of this shepherd with the head like an Astrakhan sheep. It was in this hour that the celestial clock proclaimed the commencement of my life. I shall tell you the story, in my mother's own words:

"I was then thirty years old, less two weeks, since I was born two weeks before Saint George's day, and we were then in the first week of April. When Akime's anger had somewhat abated, he began to consider my ankle, and at length he said:

" 'Now, for the first time, Rada, I see that you possess the ankle of a goat—a very beautiful ankle, indeed! Come, won't you show me your knee? If it is as beautiful as your ankle, Rada, I'll marry you!'

"When Akime said that to me, I was sitting on the ground, knitting, and he was standing over me,

leaning on his crook. I had not looked at him directly more than three times in all the five years I had known him. I had hardly ever looked any human being in the face, since I had lost my eye. But when I heard him say that he would marry me if I but possessed a beautiful knee, I raised my head, for I thought that he must have gone crazy. And then I perceived that Akime himself had a pretty black moustache and beautiful eyes, like those of an excited stallion. I did not look at him longer than an instant. One must not look too long at such a thing as that. But that brief instant was enough to determine me—I would indeed show him my knee! And I said to myself: ‘Now, Rada, my girl, this is the last of your snow-rubs and your hillside rolling! Now you shall have the real thing!’ But, still painfully remembering my affliction, I said, so as to inflame him the more by the delay:

“‘My poor Akime, if you had to marry all the women who have shown you their knees, you would have to have barracks!’

“‘Rada, I swear that I shall marry you! May the wolves devour all my sheep, if I do not marry you!’

“‘You need not swear, Akime. I know that a man must promise everything, because a woman asks for the moon as soon as she has shown him her knee. But I am not such a woman. Here is my knee, Akime!’

“Then I uncovered it, without looking at Akime, and continued with my knitting all the while. But Akime snatched off his heavy bonnet and flung it on the ground with such force that it snapped like a pig’s bladder. In the same instant I felt myself lifted, my waist surrounded by an arm as hard as wood. I lay passive as long as he carried me, but as soon as he set me down, I ran away—not really with the intention of escaping

him, but merely so as to excite him the more, and to make him forget that I had only one eye.

"Well, he did forget it! He forgot it so completely that, after he had pursued me a long time across the fields and over the hills, he threw his stick at my legs and made me fall. I had been waiting for just that—to be able to fall, but to fall as his quarry. Man must always be in the wrong; for if, together with his arm as hard as wood, he were to be in the right as well, what would become of us poor women? If Akime had not been in the wrong that night, down there by the elms—while the sheep bleated as if they were in the desert, and the two donkeys seemed astonished at our long absence—what would have become of me, poor Rada, with my Floritchica in my arms, through all the long winter—I, with pains in my stomach, just like Sultana, the cartwright's daughter, and grown as weak as that very Mary, who had once so immoderately attracted my Akime.

"So it came about that he was obliged to get on as best he could by his own unaided efforts, caring for our master's two herds of sheep, making the cheese, gathering dry wood, preparing mamaliga and borsht with fish, and even washing the linen in whey, to keep away the lice.

"Poor Akime was soon quite beyond his depth, what with overwork and a sick woman. And for my part, I, too, had enough, what with my bed and an all too healthy man. Thus it happened that, after two years of housekeeping, he one day said to me what I had long wished to say to him:

"'Listen to me, Rada! We have made an ill go of it. I have made you sick, and you have made me a slave.

We were both better off two years ago than we are to-day. Now, let us try to set right our mistake. See here! I have twenty sheep, and they are my whole fortune. You have the same number. I will give you mine, as a dowry for our child; but you must let me go away, in God's name! If you will do this, little Floritchica will soon have a strong mother to look after her. But I must go out into the world and find myself another master. And I swear to you, Rada, that I shall never again ask any woman to show me her knee, and never again shall I throw my stick at a woman's legs when she tries to escape from me!

"Thus spoke my poor Akime. He kissed me. Then he kissed his child. The little one clenched her fingers in his mane and, for the first time in his life, he wept at the pain of parting from her. But after that he left us, in God's name, and I never heard his voice again."

Floarea Codrilor paused to stifle a sigh. Throughout the first part of her narrative, as well as during that which followed, she had gazed successively at each one of her listeners, not disregarding even the most humble among the haïdoucs; but it was to me, more than to any one else, that she addressed herself. She looked at me, as if her eyes wanted to say: "You, Jeremy, son of the forest, my son, you are the whole of my life! . . . It is for your sake that I am here. . . ."

The haïdoucs, struck by the earnestness of her recital, listened attentively and in silence. Spilca followed each of her words with rapt intensity; while Ely, whose expression was usually imperturbable, turned toward her the countenance of an apostle. Movila, the vataf, listened eagerly, but even in his absorption he did not

neglect to keep up the fire. Although less intelligent and more simple than the others, he was more avid for knowledge than any of us.

Floarea continued:

My first desire, when I opened my eyes upon life, was to run—to run, with the wind beating voluptuously against my chest. The wind, that friend of my youth, has only two beings that love it passionately—the free man and the dog. These two friends of the wind were also the friends of my childhood. My free man was a ragamuffin from the village; a boy three years older than I, sullen and rebellious; and he was my master in my initiation to the mysteries of liberty. You will doubtless all be amazed when I tell you that, at this very moment, he is the chief of the haïdoucs who hold sway over the hills of Buzeu, ten miles hence, and spread terror among the cowards who make the laws. His name is—Groza!

“Groza!” exclaimed the haïdoucs.

“Groza, the hard-hearted!” added the vataf, calling him by his familiar name.

Floarea responded with an impatient gesture:

Why do they call him “the hard-hearted”? Is it because he once flayed alive a man from his company and a gospodar? ⁴ The haïdouc who so perished was a traitor, convicted of a crime which had almost cost Groza’s life. And as to the punishment of the gospodar, that was a good deed. Go and talk with the people whom that vampire had terrorized, and you will

⁴ A country squire, or landed proprietor.

see why the women light candles for the salvation of the great hăidouc!

I knew him both as a child and as a youth. He was wild—very wild—but he had a tender heart. One day, when I was nine and he was twelve years old, as I was running against the wind, with my dog at my side, he came up and joined in my sport. Taking me by the hand, he made me run all the faster. On the top of the hill, where we both stopped, quite out of breath, the wind lifted my skirts so indiscreetly that I was shamed before this handsome lad. But he was not like the others. He did not peer at my naked legs. Instead, he turned away and occupied himself with my dog, until my embarrassment had passed.

Yet, at that time, I did not know him. I had never seen him until that day, but I at once observed that he was clean—as clean as myself. That pleased me, for I have never been able to suffer dirt. He was barefoot, with legs naked like my own, but they were washed, and only a little dusty. His hands, his neck, and his face were also freshly washed. His shirt and trousers were clean, too, although mended. I liked all these things, and I liked his frank, blue eyes as well. The only thing about him which was not to my taste was the reddish hue of his hair, his eyebrows, and his eyelashes.

And he, upon his part, seemed equally well pleased with my appearance, which in these respects was similar to his own. As if to convince himself, he submitted me to a rapid inspection. I was consumed with curiosity to know whence he came, so I asked him directly.

"From Palonnier," he replied, in a voice which was almost mature. He did not look at me when he spoke, but patted the head of my dog.

The place called Palonnier lay, some two kilo-

metres distant, along the country highway which leads from Ramnic to Buzeu, and which at that point is crossed by a local road. It consists of about thirty scattered houses. I had never ventured as far as Palonnier, because it was said that the boys there threw stones at the backs of passers-by.

"What is your name? I am called Floritchica."

"Your name is very beautiful," he said, rising and looking me in the face, "but you are yourself as beautiful as your name. My name is Groza. Some day I shall be a haïdouc!"

"Haïdouc? What does that mean?"

"What! You do not know? Then I shall tell you. A haïdouc is a man who cannot endure oppression or servitude; a free man, who lives in the forests, kills the cruel gospodars, and protects the poor!"

"I have never seen any of your haïdoucs."

"One never sees them. They are constantly pursued by the poteri."

"And what is a potera?"

"The poteri are the enemies of the haïdoucs, and the enemies of liberty. They are the army which defends the gospodars, for a Judas' wage. Three years ago, in Stag Forest, quite near our home, I saw a battle between the haïdoucs and the poteri. The haïdoucs were beaten. I shall never be beaten, when I am a haïdouc. But you must never tell a soul—not even your mother—that I am on the side of the haïdoucs! One must be silent about such things. Parents are such terrible gossips, and the very walls have ears, you know!"

At this, Groza made a gesture of disdain, which comprehended both walls and parents. It was then I perceived that he was carrying a flute in the right sleeve of his shirt. I asked:

"Can you play the flute?"

"Can I play the flute! . . . But that, too, is a secret which you must not tell to any one!"

"Why not? It is no sin to play the flute!"

Groza contemplated me for a moment, with an almost hostile expression on his face.

"No, it is no sin to play the flute; but it is a sin, and a great one, to let everybody know of it. That is, it is to one who loves the flute!"

"Why, everybody loves the flute!"

"You're a fool, Floritchica! People like the flute, just as they like a dog—in order to keep it on a leash. Just as they like a nightingale—in order to put it in a cage. Or as they like a flower, in order to pull it out of the place where God put it to grow; or as they like liberty, in order to turn it into slavery. If everybody loved the flute as I do, there would be no more haïdoucs, no more poteri, no more gospodars—only brothers. But now there are no brothers anywhere!"

"How do you know all this, Groza?"

"Now you are becoming too inquisitive! But I will tell it all to you—to you only!—because, ever since I have been watching you, I have noticed that you are the only one like me in all the eight villages that I know. But you need a dascal ⁵ and I shall be your dascal. Would you like Groza to be your dascal—Groza, who will some day be a haïdouc?"

"Yes, Groza, I should like you to be my dascal. But tell me first how you have learned all this?"

"I have learned it in this way. I have an elder brother, who is of marriageable age—an ignorant, hulking fool. He plays the flute at the village hora, so that the other fools may dance. He once had a dog,

⁵ Teacher.

which he kept chained up; and he once had a nightingale, which he put in a cage; and the poor things both died of sorrow. Then I said to my elder brother that he was a jackass—a flute-playing jackass. For having told him the truth, I was rewarded with a slap—a slap which was so little fraternal that it left my cheek the colour of an eggplant. And he continued to play the flute for other fools to dance to, put another nightingale in a cage, and chained up another dog; but I broke the cage to bits, and threw the chain down the well. Then he nearly killed me. He was no longer merely a jackass, but a regular potera; and that he will some day become one, I am quite certain. But as for me, I shall be a haïdouc, and then I shall make him give back the very milk he sucked from my mother!”

That is what he said.

Until the day when I became acquainted with Groza, I was all alone. My mother made me spend my childhood embroidering, with my eyes glued to a canvas, in order to produce that beautiful and miserable cloth which consumes the most lovely years of a young girl's life, and which is in turn consumed by moth, after two generations of ignoramuses have gaped at the marvel of its handiwork. Then I declared war against my mother and against the village. I was set down as lazy and a good-for-nothing.

But did I not do well? Are we to disdain the sun's rays, which fleck the forest paths with spots of silver? Are we never to know how a nightingale fashions its nest? Must we deprive ourselves of the caress of the wind, as it penetrates our loose clothing; must we renounce the murmur of the brook, which races happily toward the river? Are we to be deaf to the summons of spring, when it proclaims a new life; to the appeal

of summer, groaning beneath the weight of its abundance; are we to forget the rich and melancholy autumn, and spin out our years without ever being dazzled by the white affliction of winter? To what purpose is such a complete renunciation of the world's beauty?

To fashion long towels of borangic, destined for the paws of a husband who will slap your face; or to make beautiful bedspreads of fine linen and lace, so that a drunken male may throw himself upon them with his muddy boots; or to weave woollen carpets as thick as your hand, so that the dearest, chosen one of your soul may vomit his red wine and pastrama on the year of your youth which you spent in the weaving of this joyous gift, dreaming the while you wove it of this same beautiful day? Oh, seductive hope of every poor peasant child, how happy am I that you were never mine! I refused to keep my eyes fastened on a piece of cloth, for the sake of a dream which the lives I saw on every side of me told me was a lie.

My eyes, which might have been filled with tears from the strain of close work over a gherghef, I yielded instead to be filled by the light of the fields as I led my sheep; I made them pierce the blue of the skies, the depth of the abysses, and the tops of the pine trees; and if they were ever filled with tears, it was when they were smitten by the brutality of my first lover, the wind!

The wind! The wind!

Mighty friend of the free man!

Messenger who traverses space in a stream of purity:

Be you the zephyr which caresses the face

Or the breeze which lashes the cheeks,

Or whether you blow in tempest

To show us the friendliness of your heart,
You remain ever the mighty friend of the free man,
Uniting all free hearts!

The wind! The wind! Friend of man;
May your passage be rich in tenderness,
Scattering petals instead of kisses,
Or sounding with your spirit
The trumpet of all resentments and all joys!
You are the messenger of my melancholy,
Of my hopeless lament for my distant love;
You are the bearer of my cry of misery,
Of my hot tear, of my resounding laughter!
You are the mighty friend of the free man,
You, the wind, the wind!

"Do you know," Groza said to me, one day, after we had run ourselves breathless in the fields, "do you know that the wind once very nearly became the father-in-law of the rat?"

"No, I never heard of that!"

"Yes, the wind was once within a hair's breadth of giving his beautiful daughter to the most cowardly animal of the earth, and only escaped so doing by virtue of a maliciously clever reply.

"One day the rat went up to the sun, and spoke to him in this fashion:

" 'Listen to me, mighty sun! I am the most miserable of all the earth's creatures. I am eternally pursued by men, dogs, and cats. Night and day, I must be on the alert, at every moment prepared against the possibility of falling into a trap, and always near to dying with fear. And what is my crime? Merely that of having occasionally gnawed, at great risk and peril to myself, at a cob of corn or a bit of cheese!'

"'But, my friend, that is immoral!' said the sun, who does not like rats.

"'That may be true,' the pretender exclaimed, 'but do you ignore the fact that the masters of the world do the same thing? And that they do so, moreover, without being exposed to any personal risk or danger at all? I have observed something! I have observed that, in order to insure their safety, these far-seeing ones invariably marry the daughters of powerful men, and thus protect themselves by the influence of their fathers-in-law. Well and good, then! I, too, have determined to do as they do, and I have therefore sought out you, the most powerful of all! Give me your daughter in marriage, and lend me your protection! I have had enough of this life!'

"The sun, panic-stricken, promptly countered:

"'You are mistaken! It is not I who am the most powerful in the universe!'

"'Who, then?'

"'The cloud! Certainly you must have noticed how, at the very height of noon, when my greatest desire is to scorch the earth, the cloud rudely covers up my face! A sorry spectacle I present then! Go, my friend; go to the cloud! Ask him for his daughter! For it is he who is the most powerful!'

"The rat stuck up his tail and ran to the cloud. Again he related his story, and concluded:

"'It is you who are the most powerful! Give me, then, your daughter!'

"'I? I, the most powerful? Surely, you are making sport of me!'

"'Not at all! The sun explained it to me very clearly, and what he said is quite true. You can obscure him whenever you wish!'

"'I obscure him! But for how long? A puff of wind, and there is nothing left of me! It is the wind, yes, the wind who is the most powerful! I can assure you of that! Besides, as soon as you speak to him of his power, he will be pleased, for he is quite vain. But I warn you that he is also very fickle in his sentiments! And he is a wily fellow! But, wily as he is, he will surely be obliged to give you his daughter.'

"So the rat set out to find the wind, who at that moment was amusing himself by rocking his daughter to sleep in her hammock. The rat made known his difficulties and the purpose of his visit.

"'Don't take me for an upstart,' he concluded. 'I shall continue to work for my living. But I clearly perceive that, without the protection of some powerful personage, my continued existence will be rendered impossible. All the corn and all the cheese are monopolized by the strong. All that is left for the weak is to tighten their belts!'

"'But you are not at all weak!' exclaimed the wind. 'On the contrary, you are more powerful than I am!'

"'What!' cried the rat, excessively flattered.

"'You are, indeed! Do you see that rock, out there in the sea? Before it was where you see it now, it formed a part of that mountain, which projects out from the mainland like a cape. Several thousand years ago, powerful but stupid lords built a castle up there—a castle as mighty and as stupid as its masters. The beautiful mountainside was despoiled of game; the sea was desolated by this pirates' nest, and its high walls marred the serenity of the landscape. You know how I resent any impediment to liberty. I like to run freely, and to make everything else so run along with me.

Therefore, I began to blow with all my might against this nest of vultures. But it had too strong a hold! Oh, the thousands of years of labour that I wasted, trying to disperse that vermin! As the centuries increased, they became more numerous and more arrogant. All in vain! The rock would not budge! At most, here and there a small portion of the wall would crumble, and was at once replaced. Broken-hearted, my lungs bursting from my futile efforts, I was reposing, one morning, on the far shore of the narrows, when suddenly I was startled into wakefulness by a terrific commotion. The sea rose up like a wall and came near to swallowing me! Then I saw that the rock which had supported the pirates' nest had fallen of itself! Of itself? Not at all! I darted forth and pried about the ruins, and was vexed to discover that what, with all my efforts, I had not succeeded in doing in thousands of years, you rats had accomplished in a few generations! For, you see, these lords had piled up in their cellars all the abundance of the world; and you very well know that lords and abundance are invariably accompanied by rats. You three belong to the same race. And the rat-rat race had so well carried out its immemorial task of disputing with the lord-rat race for this abundance, that the rock—excavated by the one for a stronghold, and by the other for the business of pilfering—ended by breaking off! That is what I meant when I said, a minute ago, that you are stronger than I. So go back, my friend, and marry a daughter of your own tribe; and learn that the good God has so equably distributed power among His creatures that, with a little modesty, every one can well be satisfied! ”

Groza soon became the soul of my days; and I, in turn, had the joy of perceiving that I was his only

friend. This was because we alone of all the children of the countryside were aware of a thing which even our elders failed to see: namely, the sordidness of that peasant life, compounded wholly of drudging labour and mean pleasures. We alone were not reconciled to it—in the season of the heavy summer labours, to bend from morning until night over a field three-fifths of whose harvest would go to fill the granaries of our masters; from autumn until spring, to break one's back over the loom whose interminable cloth was a forbidden fruit which must always be preserved for the future; and in winter, to pass long and tedious evenings gossiping in the clacas, while one shelled corn or beans, or carded wool at a neighbour's house, or helped to make the trousseau of some friend, in foolish ecstasies over her few miserable rags. Nor did we care to participate in the only diversion of that drab life—the stupid Sunday hora, where one is insufferably bored after a quarter of an hour of monotonous dancing, interrupted, perhaps, by an occasional conversation at the fountain with some lover who speaks vaguely of diverse matters, but with only a certain definite end in view.

An instinctive aversion kept Groza and me away from this round of work, and from the pleasures which were supposed to compensate it. As soon as the understanding which existed between us was observed, we became the object of all the animosities and the target of all the ridicule of our neighbours. For, however diligently one tries not to annoy mediocrity and to efface oneself in its presence, mediocrity does not tolerate those who dare to distinguish themselves from her pattern. She is in agreement only with herself, and can suffer her own visage only.

But, God forbid! we did not counsel anybody to take up our manner of life, and we never invited others to join of an evening in our private clacas! Groza, at the age of seventeen, owned his own cart and horse, and he had earned them both by the sweat of his brow. At that time this was the only deliverance of a man from mercenary labour, for it gave him at least the aspect of freedom. Twice each week my friend carried the products of our common toil to the market at Buzeu—wool, cheese, lambs, wheat, vegetables, eggs, fruit, and fowl, according to the season.

This tender solidarity between two children who refused to kiss the hand of a priest in league with the boyars, or to remove their *caciuli* upon encountering a valet of the court, was regarded as criminal, not only by those directly interested, but also by those who, being serfs themselves, ought to have followed our example. We were accused of precocious concupiscence. In point of fact, however, although I was well developed for my fifteen years, I was still only a happy gamin, and Groza himself was almost childishly pure in all his thoughts and actions. Still, in the eyes of the evil-minded, our escapades in the woods and our long absences from the village were just so many subterfuges for libertinage.

The beautiful existence which we had created for ourselves was like a sunlit island in the midst of an ocean of darkness. It was during these years that Groza taught me to play on the flute, and to appreciate with my intelligence the grandeur of untamed Nature, which I had hitherto only apprehended with my heart.

In the groves of birch trees and pines, when his fingers first consented to modulate for me one of our enchanting *doïnas*, he appeared to me as one of those

Fat Fromos of the legends. Forgetting his insipid blondness, forgetting even my pride, I fell at his feet and embraced them.

Doïna, doïna, tender song!
Who could resist
The magic of your harmonies?
Doïna, doïna, hymn of fire!
Hearing you in the prairies,
One's heart is filled with love!

God, All-Powerful! in my heart I know that You began Your Creation and accomplished it as You played on the flute to the amorphous elements! For only thus could it have come about that the Universe which was fashioned by Your hands is a single great, miraculous song, flowing like a river of eternal praise!

It was also during these years that I learned to read and write the Greek language. And it is to Groza, likewise, that I owe this accomplishment.

He had instructed himself in this language, which remained unknown to the rest of the village, on his occasional journeys to Buzeu.

"Should you like to learn Greek?" he asked me, one day. "In our own language there is nothing fit to read. If one wishes to read or to write, one must choose between the Slavic and the Greek. If you were to do as I have done, you would learn many wonderful things!"

"I should very much like to try. But where? and how?"

"The famous cantor Joakime, who sings in the Church of the Single Tree, at Buzeu, will teach you. He is my friend, in spite of the malicious tongues that say he is a satyr. I have never believed a word of that

story, and neither will you. It is true that the cantor Joakime is a man whose aspect and voice might well frighten one. But only imbeciles have nothing at all about them which somebody might take to be frightful. Besides, he stands above all this, and is much admired, in spite of the slander. I have often spoken to him of you, and he is looking forward with joyous anticipation to the day when he shall meet you. He will be glad to have a friend, for he is like us—he has no friends.”

So the next Sunday—a beautiful, spring day—I climbed up into Groza’s cart. He was proud of his horse, for it was a truly beautiful beast; and I was proud of Groza, who drove in a masterly fashion, holding himself erect and immobile, like a full-grown man.

We were both arrayed in our Sunday best—he, with polished boots, a shirt of borangic, a flowered *cojoc*, and a *caciula tzourcana*; I, bare-headed, in a white dress with hand-embroidered *flottas*, my ickle and slippers of velour, decorated with a brilliantly coloured design. We were as radiant as a young married couple.

Even the landscape, hitherto unknown to me, which unfolded itself before my eyes during this seven-league journey, was as radiant as ourselves; and, like us, it was also arrayed in its Sunday best. This was my first long journey, and I could not cease exclaiming at sight of the vine-covered slopes, the unknown forests, the rivers and brooks, the winding roads, and the birds and animals—things, animate and inanimate, appearing one by one and disappearing behind us, as if some invisible hand had raised a series of curtains, disclosing them successively before our approach. I sat on a cushion beside my friend, who remained silent. But when, at length (on the side of a deserted hill), he spoke, it was to implant in my spirit the germ of his innate rebel-

lion, which was already ripe and ready to burgeon forth:

"All that you see here, all this that pleases you so much," he said, as he swung his whip round and round above our heads, "all this beautiful earth, so far-stretching and so broad, must belong equally to us all: for we come upon the earth naked, and she offers herself to us, so that we may labour upon her and enjoy her fruits. She does not belong to us now. But she must one day be truly ours. We must wrest this lovely earth of ours from the hands of those who hold it without working it. This we must do!"

That is all Groza ever told me about the servitude of the earth under the rule of the gospodars. I understood then that he would one day be a haïdouc, for the haïdoucs are the only ones who do not think as the rest of the world. To hear what the world says, one would suppose that God willed it that there should be serfs and gospodars, poor and rich, the chastised and those who castigate them. But the haïdoucs overreach the will of God. They do not go to church; but instead, they withdraw into the forests, whence they sally forth to make horrifying incursions upon the possessions of the tyrants, and even upon those of the churches, sacking, killing, and—relieving the poor and the oppressed!

Buzeu, the capital city, seemed to me like a young girl who does nothing but preen herself on her beauty. I saw two coquettish streets, which resembled two painted eyebrows. All the mud and dust had been carefully removed, and everywhere the ground was covered with wood. The shops were arrayed in rows, one after another, with big plate-glass show-windows, behind which one could admire the displays until one was sur-

feited with such a variety of grandeur. Here were articles of native production; there were inconceivably luxurious foreign silks, and, further on, an exhibition of armour, intricately carved. Elsewhere, one saw tobacco, in long, golden, silken strings, scattered among tchiboucks and narghilahs from Stamboul. There were shops filled with carpets, and others displaying ikons and censers of massive silver, as well as stoles and hats for priests, and holy books. Food and drink were being dispensed in an amazingly large number of shops, and the cafanas were filled with people, drinking their aromatic coffee, smoking tchiboucks, and conversing in various languages.

All of these shops bore signs with a variety of appropriate names, such as: "The Buzoian Peasant Girl," "The Golden Kashmir," "The Damascene Arabesque," "The Ispahan Rug," "The Vizir's Tchibouck," "The Inn of the Happy Arrival," "The Silver Censer," "The Cafana of the Little Bey," and the like.

Groza left his cart in the stable of a moujik inn, on the outskirts of the town. The heavy carts of the poor were not permitted access to the paved streets; only carriages were allowed there. We walked about, admiring everything, quite abashed in the presence of so much wealth, and very ill at ease in the midst of the multitude of fatuous promenaders, who passed and disappeared, conversing, fingering large amber rosaries, and staring at us as if we were two-headed calves. The greater number of the boyars were dressed in caftans, with ichelis adorned in superb designs; others were dressed in the manner usually seen only in the west. The latter were, for the most part, the young sons of local boyars, home from foreign universities. They had

close-cropped moustaches, and they all wore monocles, which caused me to fancy that they had become half-blind from an excess of studying.

There were only a few women, but these few were all extremely beautiful and, what was more, very skillfully made up. Their heads were bare, and they wore their hair drawn straight back and down over the temples, and veiled with fine, transparent gauze. They wore extremely tight corsets and enormous, bell-shaped skirts, which swept the ground. They sauntered along languorously, leaning on the arms of their husbands and speaking to them in voices for all the world like the voices of parrots.

"Here," Groza said, "one cannot hope to enter anywhere without having in one's purse as much money as we earn in a whole summer. It is we serfs who provide the means for these gospodars and their families to live in this and other larger towns. That is why they keep *poteri* to defend them, and to force us to toil for their comfort. As for myself, I do not wish to be a serf. Soon I shall be a *haïdouc*. All we *haïdoucs* will then incite the villagers to revolt, and we shall put an end to injustice!"

The Church of the Single Tree, it was said, was constructed—from roof to altar screen—out of one single oak.

It was shortly before noon, the hour of high mass. We dared not enter at once, only gospodars being permitted entrance to this church—a discrimination that also prevailed in the exclusive shops.

Outside, equipages, coaches, saddle-horses, coachmen, and footmen, in picturesque confusion, awaited their masters. The latter invariably prayed in the special church reserved for them, although it proved

to be the modest one constructed of a single tree, in the same manner that they repaired to debauch themselves in certain particular houses, hypocritically described as cottages.

We awaited the termination of the religious services and the departure of these earnest Christians who obeyed Christ's commands by monopolizing the earth. They issued forth, with the countenances of devout butchers, and occupied their carriages. Their knavish servants were set into a panic of commotion at the appearance of their masters, which was heralded by peals of the imperial bells. We hid behind this display of pomp, holding each other's hand like a guilty pair, and slipped into the forsaken church, where the odour of musk left by those libertine gentry quite prevailed to drown out the incense.

Here my surprise was far greater than when I had beheld the exclusive shops for the first time. How different the modesty of our poor parish church and the lavishness of this one! Its clientele, surely, was as fine as that of the shops outside!

I first noticed, beneath the stained glass windows, the sombre altar screen, rich with mouldings and sculpture. Above, in the centre, God triumphant, radiant with health despite His hoary beard, weighed with one hand the ignoble earth which He had fashioned, while with the index finger of the other He menaced His children with inexplicably dire punishments. On the two leaves of the altar door, those saintly apostles, Peter and Paul, as healthy as their master, performed the duties of jailer, the latter holding aloft the pillars of Christianity, the former bearing the keys to the orthodox Paradise. Then came a whole gallery of saints, with the expressions of policemen; then the martyrs

and guardians of the Church, garbed in silver and massive gold; then two rows of heavily upholstered and richly carved benches, with plates bearing the names of the fortunate parishioners who owned them. Three chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling. Two candelabra burned before the Christ and the Virgin. Two huge candlesticks were placed before the pews. In these were burning long candles of pure wax, some of such magnitude that I could not fancy what enormities their donors must have committed, since I supposed that their sins were doubtless proportionate with the size of the candles.

Groza left me, for an instant, in the midst of this Christian arsenal and, going to the sacristy, knocked at the door. Joakime, the cantor, appeared. He was a man of some forty years, stocky and bald, with the neck of a bullock.

"This is my friend, Floritchica," Groza said, pointing to me while I was yet some distance away.

The man reared on his short legs and remained stock-still, as though dumbfounded at the information. His expression, which was that of a religious zealot, became inflamed, and his cheeks turned to a glowing orange. He lifted both hands and, with a violence that caused the windows to rattle, uttered the Greek word, "Evloghimeni!"—"Blessed!"

Frightened, I should have liked to flee. But I saw Groza smile and wink at me. The cantor continued and, though my fear increased, I was so pleased by the sound of his voice, which was said to be among the finest in Roumania, that I remained where I stood.

"Blessed be your humid eyes! Blessed be your moist lips! And blessed be all the humidities of the earth, which have caused such a fruit to grow!"

I felt myself blush at this benediction of so many humidities. Joakime proceeded to discuss droughts. In the eighth tone, he sang:

"For Thy humidities it is, O Lord, that enable the earth to support the drought, O all-powerful Lord!"

Groza placed a hand on the cantor's shoulder, interrupting him.

"Cease these false psalms about humidities and droughts, and teach her the alphabet! You forget that we must sleep in our own cottages, and not in the Inn of the Safe Arrival!"

For a moment the cantor stared Groza straight in the face, and then resumed his chant with renewed violence.

"Those who slee-eeep together in a cottage will be warmer than those who slee-eeep apart in a pa-alace!"

"You old fool, we don't sleep together!" Groza explained.

"Broo-ooks flo-ow into streams. And man and woman flo-ow together!"

"Go to the devil!" my companion shouted, shaking the cantor's arm. "Are you, or are you not, going to teach her the alphabet? Remember, you promised me that you would."

"Yes, I promised!" Joakime said, approaching me as though he were a somnambulist. "And I shall begin at once."

He scrutinized me with the frankest, most ingenuous eyes in the world.

"Floritchica! Black dove! Pronounce, after me, exactly as I pronounce: Al-pha, Be-ta, Gam-ma, Del-ta, Ep-silon. . . ."

Without hesitation I pronounced the letters after him, until we had reached the end.

"Ehtahtos! Ehtahtos!" ⁶ he cried, in Greek. "Just one slight mistake, which must be corrected. It is those three letters which are difficult to articulate: Gam-ma, Dz-eta, and Th-eta. For the Gam-ma, move your throat as though you were gargling. Imitate the sound of the wind for the Dz-eta. As for the Th-eta, it is precisely like the hiss of an angry gander. Now, pronounce the letters, and let me see your mouth. I will help you."

I pronounced the letters. He studied my mouth intently and, with his finger-tips, touched my chin. Then, as if scorched, he snatched his hand away and began to run round the church in lamentation, his fingers clasped over his tonsure.

"You poor fellow, you poor fellow! The mouth is the source of the ancient intoxicating nectar. That mouth was not created to spell out the alphabet; it was made to scatter life and death. Surely, this is the girl of whom the ecstatic sage thought when he wrote: 'O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice!' Yes, your eyes and your voice . . . and your mouth, too, he might have added! But, oh Solomon! To what avail is a heart that desires to see and hear these goodly things, when one is misshapen as an ape? And what sin have I committed, if my heart is on my left side, like that of a fool, and not on my right side, like that of a sage? O Lord, Thou knowest my errors, and my sins are not hidden from Thine eyes!"

Joakime, having ended, returned at once to me and said, in sharply clipped sentences that aped the accent of the nobility:

⁶ Admirable!

"Cori-mou! Coritzaki-mou!" Do not wrong me by thinking me vulgar. My folly is not dangerous, and my crime consists only in words. Do not deprive me of the privilege of your grace. Go, now, in good health, and come back to me in good health. I shall teach you the Greek language with the excellence of the erudite and the disinterestedness of a friend. And you will then be armed with a sword, such as few people are able to wield."

I kissed the cantor on both cheeks, and said:

"Joakime, you are the first man whom I have kissed in my life!"

For a whole year the cantor of the Church of a Single Tree continued to teach me Greek, and a host of other things as well. Sometimes he proved a polite, at other times an almost bashful master; he was by turns wild, audacious, and almost mad. Still, his temper revealed to me various phases of human nature worthy of attention, and since my character and mentality differed from those of other girls, I gently lent myself to his inoffensive desires—if but to discover if his purity were genuine or if it were merely simulated.

It was real.

My lessons took place twice a week, and always in the empty church after the eleven o'clock mass. Occasionally Groza was present. Sometimes he left us alone. But whether we were alone or not, Joakime was always the same. He realized that I loved his singing as much, if not more, than his Greek lessons, and he always greeted me with an explosion of celestial hymns, which fell upon my soul like a cataract of light. He had an inexhaustible repertoire of canticles and psalms, as well as improvisations and vocal modulations. His

⁷ My girl, my little girl! (in Greek).

sincerity was such that it took cognizance of no one. One day he forgot me completely and went into the vestry room, where I found him in tears. But this very sincerity had aspects which occasioned me many embarrassing moments. Sometimes, without interrupting the lesson, and looking at me all the while with his innocent, ox-like eyes, he would place his hands upon my belly or my breasts, and excuse himself the while in this fashion:

"Never in my life have I laid my hands on anything so pleasant! I do not wish to die without having experienced the warmth of these things! Floritchica, allow me! Every fool knows such beauties as these without appreciating them, whereas I appreciate them without knowing them. You can make me happy, and at so little cost! Soon you will squander yourself, without the reward of such appreciation. Do not fear that I will seek further in my happiness. Though Ecclesiastes is right when he says that the end of a thing is worth more than the beginning, it is none the less true that, in this world at least, a great many beginnings are far better than their ends. It is also true that, in order to understand this, one must have looked upon life with other eyes than those of Ecclesiastes!"

I permitted him his pleasure, being always vigilant lest he should attempt to go further. But he never did. Not only did he never ask for more, but he never again returned to the subject. He completely forgot it. Now that I am no longer ignorant of the mysteries of my physical existence, and am disgusted with the lies with which it is surrounded, I often ask myself if I was right to hold so common an article at such a high price against the man who gave me the happiest moments of my life. I often wished to give him, as a proof of my

gratitude, some token which would leave a remembrance of me in his mind.

"What?" he would say. "A basket of eggs? Chickens? A tub of butter? A donitza of honey? My house is amply stocked. Why, even if you could offer me a saint with a nimbus of pure gold, or a rosary with beads of the rarest amber, or a luxurious narghilah from Smyrna, I should not want them. The gospodars who, for God knows what reason, are so enthusiastic about my voice, overwhelm me with that sort of refuse. What I most desire, what would transport me with happiness, neither you nor even the Lord God can give me—a body and a face better suited to my voice and to my heart. These alone would permit me to live the kind of life for the lack of which I am agonized in this ass's carcass. But it is exactly that which God did not wish me to possess. Neither did He wish the nightingale to flaunt the plumage of the peacock. Perhaps He has ordered these things for the best, for it is well said that, if the pig had horns, he would destroy the world."

Such was the man I discovered in Joakime, the cantor, who was calumniated by every one. The following summer I discovered in him yet another man; and this was an unbelievable surprise for me, as well as for the town, and even for Groza himself.

I was now seventeen years old. And I was beautiful, as you can see. That beauty attracted to me the attention, among others, of the son of our gospodar, Bolnavul, the proprietor of twenty thousand hectares of land and timber, as well as of innumerable breeding-studs and flocks of cattle. To this one-eyed, bemonocled fellow, who was just home from his studies, I was only a pretty, two-legged sheep, easy to capture and happy,

no doubt, at having excited so august an appetite. He was far from anticipating the slightest resistance upon my part. He was a personage, while I was merely something that happened to be standing upright, and ought of right to be ready to fall prone at the slightest sign from the master. And his studies had taught him so little that he could think of no better beginning than by insulting me.

One Sunday, during that summer which was so decisive in Groza's life, Manolacki, the coconache, as he was called by his slaves, came with his younger sister to the village hora, himself driving the splendid horse harnessed to their carriage. He came there as a future lord, in order to assure himself of his popularity among the people, and in order to inspect his other flock—the flock that provided him with flesh for his pleasures. Our sovereign, by the grace of God and the stupidity of man, at once adopted a jocular manner, in the worst possible taste. His sister, who was equally stupid, was not at all annoyed, and the mob responded as though it were receiving manna from heaven. The old folk took off their *caciulas* and revealed their silvery hair; the young ones continued to dance, but in the manner of an exhibition calculated to please the visitors; while the *pomojnic*,⁸ a servile creature who accompanied his master, out-did himself in coarse platitudes. He ordered the *carciumar* to distribute several *okas* of wine, and the drinkers wished their hosts "health and a long life." Then the aristocrats moved among the company and drank with every one present, leaving their carriage in the care of a young peasant.

It was then that, for a moment, despite his warning, I left Groza and went over to caress the beautiful

⁸ Sub-prefect.

horse. I loved horses too well to be able to resist the temptation to stroke the neck of this splendid beast. I paid dearly for my pleasure, however, for the blood-suckers returned unexpectedly, and I was forced to suffer their compliments on my costume and my affection for horses. These were not in themselves unpleasant. But the coconache went further and, from the height of his seat, thought to honour me by throwing a gold piece at my feet—for “innocent pleasures,” as he explained. I covered my face with both my hands and fled from the spot, leaving the galben where it had fallen, to the consternation of both masters and serfs.

Groza, who was lying on the grass at some distance from the hora, did not learn of what had happened until the tumult among the peasants, after the boyar's departure, aroused him. He approached and found me weeping; I was shedding my first tears of pain.

I was to shed many more bitter tears, before long!

To a boor the resistance of an honest woman means nothing. He does not surmise the point where the shyness of a silly girl ends and the profound disgust of feminine dignity begins. Everything is permitted to the brutes who dominate the world.

Within two months the beast made four attempts to convince me that my sole purpose for existing was to serve his pleasures. Each time I turned away and spat. Then he essayed more brutal measures, and at once encountered the strong arm of Groza and the rebuke of his garbaci⁹.

At this time I was watching about a hundred and fifty sheep, a third of which belonged to Groza, and the remaining two-thirds to my mother and me. I was

⁹ A long whip of twisted rope.

happy, although oppressed by the slavery that weighed upon us all, and in dread of the reappearance of the monster. I well knew that, sooner or later, he would swoop down upon me, like a hawk upon a chicken. Groza had provided me with a pistol and a little dagger; these I had concealed in my sash. As an extra precaution, he came over from Palonnier daily, to pass two or three hours with me and help me bring in the sheep. Those beautiful days of tender friendship, with our three dogs, our overflowing hearts, our lofty aspirations, and the melody of our flutes, now seem ages remote!

One evening, when the sky was golden, the evil fell. The coconache was alone, on horseback. He ignored Groza's presence and addressed himself solely to me, greeting me with a "Good-evening," and asking: "Are you less cruelly disposed today?"

I did not even answer, but simply turned my back on him and walked away. Groza, who was standing beside a pond, immediately began to beat the water with his garbaci. I divined that he wished to harden the cords, so that they would the better entwine themselves round the hips of our shameless intruder. A voluptuous feeling filled my breast at the thought that I should soon be avenged by a strong and courageous friend, while my mind, intoxicated by anger, did not consider the possible consequences of such a rash act of justice.

The boyar dismounted and, leaving his horse, would have followed me; but Groza intercepted him. He stood there, straight as a sapling and calm as a sage. The other was fully as straight, but hardly as calm. The blood rushed to his face.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing," Groza said, "except to know what you want, you—!"

The idea of being thus addressed by a moujik enraged the boyar, whose hand swept to his pistol. In the twinkling of an eye he was disarmed and thrown to the ground. Before he could rise, Groza had leaped upon our master's steed. The scene that followed made me understand the wild hatred which had been so long ripening in the heart of my friend. Instead of fleeing, as I had supposed he would do, he proceeded to whip the coconache, preferably about the face, with the wet leather lash of his garbaci, driving him all about the lonely fields, the silence of which was lacerated by the cries of the miserable wretch, and not pausing before his victim was a bleeding mass, inanimate and prone upon the ground.

Then Groza galloped over to me. He was no longer the same man. His face, larger and immobile, had the fixedness of parchment. His bloodshot eyes had lost every human quality. His lower lip hung heavy with hate. Even his voice was altered. He said to me:

"I have drunk my first cup of vengeance! It is as invigorating as a glass of cold water to a fever-stricken man. Now, Floritchica, I must leave you for ever! I shall become a haïdouc. But I shall not go alone. Seven fellows from Palonnier, all with bad reputations, will accompany me. They are not friends with hearts full of tenderness, like you and our good Joakime; and because of that I am troubled. But they are vindictive, and they thirst for a taste of the savage life. They know the forests, even as I do, and are prepared to follow me at my command. We shall meet tomorrow, at dawn, in Stag Forest, behind the leaning rock. Come there and find me. There I shall speak to you further of what

must still be done. I must now hasten to Buzeu, to tell Joakime of what has passed, and embrace him."

Then he added, pointing to his first victim:

"That beast is not dead. I did not want to kill him. I want this pretty fellow to remember me, every time he looks at himself in the mirror. He will hardly be likely to forget this adventure. I shall keep his horse. We shall visit his father's studs to get others for my companions."

It was almost night. The sheep, scattered by the man's wild flight and Groza's mad pursuit, bleated dejectedly. My friend rounded them up on horseback and helped me to gather them into the fold. My heart was nearly bursting. I felt like a stranger, abandoned in an unknown country, when I parted that evening from Groza, clinging to my favourite dog.

I cried all through the night.

The next day, at dawn, I went to the leaning rock. Groza and his seven companions were already there, together with Joakime and a stout cattle-dealer from Buzeu. Pointing to the merchant, Groza said to me:

"Floritchica, I have considered that, as a precautionary measure, you ought to let this man have your flock of sheep. I have already sold him my share. He has agreed to let you keep your sheep as long as you wish, or need them to live on. But if ever our persecutors shall attempt to touch your property, all you need say is that it does not belong to you, but to the baciú Zamfir."

I readily agreed. The baciú went away. He was a dubious, but probably useful fellow. And now came the moment of our definite separation, when I was to look for the last time upon one of the best friends I have ever possessed. Groza's eyes were full of tears,

and his emotion was so great that he could hardly speak.

"Our life is ended, Floritchica. We have been true friends, as only dogs know how to be. Never will you find another Groza, nor I another Floritchica! Ah, to have your friendship and your hatred with me, up there in the mountains and the forests! But God has not willed it to be so; we should both have become mad!

"Remain here, then; but hear what I have to say. Not all the haïdoucs live in the forest. Even in the cities, among the gospodars, one can be as good a haïdouc as the man who lives in the heart of the mountains. One need only be eternally false to the powerful and true to the oppressed. You know how to be false and how to be sincere; go, then—try to live among the wolves. Howl with them, observe their habits, study their weaknesses, and afterwards shoot them in the back and avenge the people. In other words, help me! You are more intelligent than I am, sharper, more crafty, and, moreover, you are a beautiful woman. Do, then, as I do. Sacrifice your youth, as I sacrifice mine. The common people are ugly and cowardly, because everything that emanates from them becomes ugly and cowardly. The good ones never arise. Never, not since the time of the zapciu Janco Jiano and the sluger Tudor Vladimiresco—the one a boyar with a heart, the other a peasant with a heart, but both revolutionary and haïdouc, and both treacherously slain—has a man arisen from the ranks of the people, but to oppress them the more. The few haïdoucs who rise up here and there are petty revolutionaries, and are spoken of as thieves. What they need is a chief, who can extend their field of action. One must strike

higher up. And not only at the Greeks and Turks, but also and particularly at the Roumanian boyars. One can perhaps pardon strangers for sucking the blood of our country, but how can we forgive the gospodars, who make themselves the instruments of that foreign oppression!

"There! I have waited here today to tell you why I urged you to learn to read and write from Joakime, and why I myself studied. Books give us what our intelligence alone is incapable of teaching us. One must know the past and the present, in order to know what to seek of the future. Work, then, for this better future. One does not learn Greek, in order to tend sheep! Do what your brain counsels you to do. You are shrewd enough! With a solitary hair from her head, a woman can hang a tyrant. A flick of her finger, and she can cause people to speak or to be silent. Become such a woman! And as for gold, I shall soon have enough of that for you!

"Now I must leave this part of the country. We go to the domains of Braila, near the confluence of the Buzeu and the Sereth, where I am to meet Cosma. But I shall not work with him. Certain things that he knows, I must learn. As for the rest, I prefer to act in my own way. If you ever should have need of me, go to the carciumar Ursou, who keeps the tavern at the gate of Vadeni nearest Galatz. And if you should care to live on that side, it would be still better. The poteri will be here tonight. They can do nothing to you. As for myself, let them come and find me!"

As Groza was speaking, I was scrutinizing the expressions of his companions. They suited his description. They were savage men, strong-willed, faithful perhaps, but beyond that, nothing more. O tenderness,

tenderness! If you but reigned in the heart of man, revolt would be an incomprehensible word! Poor Groza! I pitied him, knowing him to be surrounded by rebels; followed by men who had merely mutinied against another master. It is good to hate, but it is better to love. Only he who can both hate and love to the utmost, really knows how to value life.

Love, fortunately for Groza, guarded him. Love was close to him, although none then surmised it.

I observed that Joakime was maintaining a singular attitude. He was muffled in a long gheba which reached to his ankles, and a *caciula tzourcana* which almost protruded over his nose. Under his arm he carried a big ebony box, obviously very heavy, since he would each moment shift it from one arm to the other. His face, usually glowing and ruddy, was now troubled and grave, anxious and pale. This I attributed to the emotion which he felt because of the impending separation.

"My dear Joakime," I said, "you are as grieved as myself!"

"No, I am not as grieved as you are," he replied, shaking his head. "I am as grieved as Groza!"

Puzzled, Groza regarded me. Neither of us comprehended the meaning of these enigmatical words.

"What mean you, Joakime?" the *haidouc* asked.

"That I am sad like yourself, not like her."

"We heard that. But what do you mean?"

"I shall explain!"

Chanting soberly and softly, in a low voice, and passing the box the while continually from one arm to the other, he explained, while we, struck with amazement, listened.

"I am grieved like yourself, my fine Groza—a-a,

because I, too, am leaving Floritchica-a-a! Because I, too, am going to become a haïd-d-ouç! Like yourself, and with you-oo, if you will permit it! It is like this—I have had enough of the Church! Po-o-pes! Proto-popes! Incense! Parastas—dung—what not! Dead and new-born, all of them atheists! Marriages and baptisms, nothing but blasphemies! Divinity, cupidity—love of God—God deliver us from it all!”

The sweat ran down in great drops from beneath his cowl. He paused for an instant, and then opened his box, revealing its contents of large and small ducats and precious stones, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and turquoises. He held it up for all of us to see, and then said, with a burst of deep rancour:

“There, that is all that Church, gospodars, and even God Himself can offer to a man who cries for love! Because I was endowed with a voice that can lift the soul, I was torn away from my fields and mountains, from my sheep and dogs, and in exchange for all that richness, I have been offered metals which are said to be expensive, and pebbles which some people consider precious. Then I was only seventeen years old. I have been patient for a long time, awaiting that divine and mighty treasure of which I have been told so much. But I have noticed that what I receive is always the same metal and pebbles! And love? The tender love that I left behind with my tchobancoutzas, my sheep, my beautiful mornings, my skies, and my forests? Of this treasure, of this real fortune, nothing! A flattering word, a pat on the shoulder, sometimes the clasp of a polite hand, or a smile from a bloated patron—that is all! And I, with my mouth watering at the sight of beautiful breasts, imprisoned in beautiful clothes! And those eyes, which are the workmanship

of a gracious devil! And those lips, ready to pronounce the sinful word which agitates the pious soul! I, poor Joakime, swallowed my envy and my avaricious dream in the House of God! Now and then, though rarely, I could no longer resist this heartlessness of life, which demands one's best and, in return, gives but the unnecessary, the superfluous. Then I would touch an enticing breast, and to sinful eyes and lips I would say: 'I, too, would delight to quaff this wine and partake of these fruits!' But then the tune was different! No longer was I 'our chaste Joakime, whose peer can be found only in the Metropolitan Church.' I was a disgusting man! And why, in the name of the altar and the censer? Why was a desire in me disgusting which priests and gospodars satisfied daily?

"It was true, alas! I myself was obliged to admit that my desire was disgusting; that it was ridiculous, at any rate. God had wished me to carol, not to be loved, in the sphere wherein I functioned. I could even fancy that God intentionally inserted a seraph's voice in an ass's pelt, for such purity remains so only when cloaked in ugliness. And so, in the instant when I sang and transported mortals heavenward, they all adored me and overwhelmed me with frigid gifts. But the moment when I touched their palpitating possessions, they reminded me that I was still only an ass. The cherub who came to the church to let the devil enter, and to whom Joakime, the seraph, uplifted his voice and his desire, also recalled that truth to me.

"Thus, I am now returning to the kingdom which vanity taught me to betray, just as the overflowing river must ultimately return to its bed. And my voice, which has been wont to expend its strength in the desert of the proud city without arousing the slightest charit-

able emotions, shall henceforth sound in the hearts of men who have outlawed themselves and chosen a difficult life for the good of their fellow men. And I shall say: 'O Lord, I see Thee at daybreak. My soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh yearns for Thee in this desert earth, to behold Thy strength and glory, even as I once contemplated it when in the sanctuary. For Thy goodness transcends life, and my lips shall therefore praise Thee. The proud of heart have mocked at me until I could bear no more. But I forgot not Thy law. Remove from me all reproach, all scorn, for I have kept Thy testimony!'

"So, here am I, and thus the cantor Joakime, who found no charity in the Church of the Single Tree, will henceforth march with Groza as a haïdouc, to bear testimony to God, and to seek love!"

The friend who is about to depart for ever is dearer than the one who comes, never to leave us again. With the last wave of my hand I sank down beside my uncomprehending dog and hid my face in his shaggy hair. Then I went home, feeling as though I had come from a funeral. I saw my home, my forests, and my beasts. They appeared desolate, as though the country had been devastated by some great conflagration.

Sorrow, until then a stranger to me now oppressed my soul. Everything which once had been to me a source of voluptuous joy, now became a source of voluptuous pain. Lord, where have you placed more voluptuousness, in the joy or the pain of a lover's soul? The rustle of leaves, the song of chanticleer, the bark of dogs, the bleat of sheep, the unending stirrings of my friend the wind, were just so many bruises to my heart tormented by dor.¹⁰ Like a shadow in search of

a soul, I wandered night and day through the forests of birch and pine. My flute, which hitherto had not known what desolate solitude meant, filled the forests with loud wails, surprising the song-birds.

Comely and melancholy dor
Of souls rich and full of love:
When we are robbed of a fortune,
We find another fortune in our dor!

That "other fortune" I found not only in my dor. It came to me in the person of a man who later proved to be a deceptive dream. But I knew that this dream would prove false, and I drank the sweetness of its illusion with the thirst of a soul prepared to be deceived.

One day a messenger came from Groza to inform me that, within a week, Cosma would pass through, to see if anything were happening. In his note he spoke much of Cosma, and concluded thus: "I have placed a kiss on Cosma's shaggy cheek. Gather it, in whatever fashion your heart may suggest to you!"

My heart persuaded me to seek this kiss on both of Cosma's shaggy cheeks, in order to be the more sure of finding it. Undoubtedly I did find it, for the man had but two cheeks. I likewise found something else which I had not been looking for, but which came of itself, like a tempest which none can leash.

That week my flute resounded through the woods with the tones which only an impetuous dor is capable of extracting from a hollow elderwood branch with eight holes, while my eyes ceaselessly searched the

¹⁰ An untranslatable word—one of the treasures of the Roumanian language—signifying regret, burning desire, nostalgia.

ground, and at last discovered the imprints of horse-shoes unknown in our part of the country. I followed them and, one morning, I surprised them at their source, in the clearing where Cosma and his brother, Ely, were smoking their pipes, satisfied with life, and not having the least idea of my existence. Cosma acted the lord, and I made fun of him. Nevertheless, I at once knew him as the man who was to be my master.

In order to excite him I fled. He hastened at once to search for me, and discovered the verity of the rule which says that she who flees from a man causes herself to be the more desired by him. That very evening, after having thus sufficiently aroused Cosma in the glowing pine forest, I allowed him to imprison my waist with that arm which had spread so much consternation among the gospodars.

It was Cosma who took me, but it was to Groza's heart that I had given myself. Cosma received but what every man can have—Groza possessed my soul, which he alone valued. Thus I lived out an impossible dream in an hour of forgetfulness. I sounded the abysses of the sea with my finger; I asked of life all that it could give. I wanted Cosma, Groza, and all possible happiness for myself alone. But I found nothing at all. Then I broke my elderwood flute. And for three years I lived another life, at the end of which time I went to bury in the woods that which I had gathered in the woods.

After that, I donned the mask of falsehood and disappeared into the world, from whence I have now returned, honest once more, and ready to perpetrate all the good and all the evil that this world may require of me.

Such is the person that I am!

*THE NARRATIVE
OF ELY THE WISE*

“IT is now your turn, Ely the Wise, brother of Cosma, and my adviser! It is now your turn to tell us who you are and how you came to become a haïdouc!”

Thus spoke Floarea Codrilor, our captain.

Ely slowly dropped his caciula to the ground. Perhaps he realized that, in thus uncovering his smooth, unfurrowed brow and his long mane, which he wore in the fashion of the haïdoucs, he was presenting to us a head unique in its repose. His was the face of a Greek Catholic warrior, adept at killing between two prayers, and at eating and drinking between two killings. His black eyes, clear, precise, neither timid nor audacious, indicated firmly: “Peace to you, or I shall kill you!” The light of martyrdom, hesitating between life and death, shone from his long beard, woven of raven-black and silver-white, so thick and heavy that it quite obscured his bushy moustaches, the formidable guardians of a mouth ready at any moment to cry out the incomprehensible word: “Justice!”

That word was uttered in the first sentence of his tale.

I CAME to live in the woods in order to find justice, which had fled from the city.

My father kept a han¹¹ at Braila, where I was born. My father, may the devil take him, was a man of

¹¹ Inn.

good intentions. But a great many well-intentioned men are no better than tyrants in their own homes, especially when they are at the helm of their domestic establishment. My father held the wheel of our house, a huge Turkish man-of-war; and, for its better protection against any storm, he anchored it in dead waters, despite the protests of some warriors to whom that dull security was displeasing.

"You do not like it?" he would say. "Wait until Allah has called me to himself. Then you may do as you please!"

"Yes," we would answer—my brother Cosma, my sister Kyra, and I. "Yes, we shall do as we please, when Allah has called you to himself; but when will he call you?"

"That is Allah's business!"

Yes, that was Allah's business, which was a very stupid state of affairs, for we were in extreme haste to follow our own inclinations, while our father was in no hurry whatever to go to heaven and hand over the helm to us. Although old, he still clung to the rudder with a strong hand, guiding himself according to principles which he had himself invented.

He piously believed in God, in all gods, and feared all gods alike. In order to placate them all, he introduced into his harem beautiful women representing each of the three great religions: Mohammedan, Jewish, and Christian. He gave his household complete freedom in the choice of religion, but rigorously imposed that some choice should be made, and thus quite forgot that the best cult of all, that of not having any cult, was not represented in his household.

He sincerely believed in God, but insisted, accord-

ing to the Roumanian proverb, that "Before one reaches God, one is liable to be devoured by the saints."

Consequently, in order to render himself pleasing to the saints as well as to God, he opened his inn freely to them, and sheltered them all. Naturally, he made them pay, which was often a matter of some difficulty, for those devilish saints were somewhat uncivilized. But my father was not a man unable to understand that to please God spiritually was good, but to procure young girls for the saints, along with purses filled with mahmoudies, was better still.

The arrangement was perfect. The lord, who in this case was none other than the Grand Vizir, gave my father a firman, declaring him to be a handgi of the Sublime Porte, with the right to seize and sell at mezat ¹² the calabalac ¹³ of any insolvent moucheteri.¹⁴ But since it happened that, now and then, a crafty moucheteri would come to the inn without any calabalac at all, my father kept a quaint sort of calabalac in readiness for such guests. As soon as the guest attempted to steal away without settling, my father would run to the all-powerful Aga and, throwing himself at the Aga's feet, present him with a package.

"The Effendi So-and-so forgot this, when he departed yesterday morning," he would say, innocently. "He likewise forgot to pay me a month's rent, but that is nothing."

It may have been nothing to my father, but it invariably proved to mean a great deal to the miserable Effendi, for the Aga, curious as all Agas are, would search the package and, finding compromising papers therein, would have the forgetful Effendi's head chopped off.

¹² Auction.

¹³ Baggage.

¹⁴ Guest.

Yes, my father was a man of very good intentions!

In order to make sure of leaving us a fortune against the future, he compelled us to live his life during the present; but only the painful part of his life. All of the household were compelled to join him in his prayers, his fasts, and his salamalecs before the mighty ones; after which, he went alone to spend many pleasant hours among his friends, either in our own house or at that of the Cârc-Serdar or with the Zapciu, where they played interminable games of ghioulbahar, to the accompaniment of purring narghilahs. Only once a year, at the bairam, was there any real pleasure—and a feast as well—for us. And even these feasts cost us dearly, coming as they did so soon after the month of ramazan, when our stomachs were out of order, on account of excessive eating at night and rigorous abstinence during the day. It was this very thing, by the way, which caused us to declare war against the head of our house.

It was Cosma, who was then hardly fifteen years old, who first dared to eat and smoke from the very beginning of ramazan. Thus began a quarrel which never ended. The two of us now opposed our father, who at first endeavoured to make us return to the law by declaring that, if we did not, the Prophet would refuse us "eternal life."

"Then we shan't have eternal life!"

"The Prophet himself fasted during this month," our father explained.

"Yes, but he slept during the day. It was easy enough for him, but we have to work!"

"He, too, worked! He worked all night, writing the Koran—the light of our faith!"

Then Cosma declared his intention of becoming a Christian.

"It was my mother's religion, and it is less troublesome. The Christian prophet at least ate every day. And he also promised us eternal life. It must be the same one."

My father, fearing to offend the other gods, acquiesced. Cosma and I then became Christians, and nothing was changed, for one can pass from one religion to another and still exist in the same skin. But then came the long fast which precedes the Christian Easter, when one must live on bread and bean soup for seven or eight weeks. We found that a ridiculous proceeding, and the quarrel broke out again with renewed violence.

"You must respect the law that you have chosen," our father howled.

"To be sure, we chose it," said Cosma, "but there must be some mistake! Surely, it is not necessary to stuff oneself with dry beans for two months, in order to gain eternal life! And in that case," concluded my brother, "We shall have to do without both. Dried beans cooked in plain water are simply impossible!"

At this our father cried out in exasperation:

"But this is terrible! Surely I shall draw upon myself the anger of some celestial power! These two refuse to obey any of the three great religions which I shelter beneath my roof!"

Nevertheless, the two of us were adamant. And our number grew to three, with my sister Kyra, and then to four, with my brother Ishmael, who one day hanged himself out of sheer gluttony. He was insatiate for those things which enter the body by way of one's

mouth, and since all such dainties were destined for our paying guests, poor Ishmael would steal them from under the eyes of the cooks, howling with pleasure as he ate them and with pain as he digested them, for our father would beat him during the process of digestion.

Our existence in this house grew the worse with the arising of our sensual passions. I was exempt from these. I have never felt the need of lifting the veil which covers the face of any woman. Cosma, to make amends, raised not only his share of veils, but my share as well, and the share of my brother who hanged himself, and the shares of all our ancestors who, like myself, had been timid, or who had hanged themselves, like Ishmael. Cosma lifted everything. It was only natural, after all, that he should do so, and I was not the least affected by his enterprise.

The han was full of women, both my father's and those of my father's friends, and the cadanas belonging to the kiabours who were guests at the han. Their odour filled the house. Cosma wandered about all day, sniffing the air like a greyhound, exactly as Ishmael wandered about the kitchen. But whereas the damage done by Ishmael was reparable, that occasioned by Cosma, it seemed, was not. At any rate, the husbands, with our father at their head, insisted that it was not. They were, however, the sole persons to complain of the scourge. The women, for their part, never complained. That is why I maintain that Cosma and the women were right, for Cosma had the Koran on his side, which gives man the right to possess several women, and the women, on their side, were supported by the Biblical sage, who says: "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four, which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a

serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid."

Moreover, since no trace was left, then whence all this commotion? For either one of two things must have occurred. Either the Prophet had read the words of the Biblical sage and had agreed with him in his Koran, or else the faithful do not respect his stipulations and, being the first to do wrong, have no right to become angry.

Nevertheless, they did become angry. Cosma was beaten. I ran to his assistance. I, too, was beaten. My brother asked where he might take that which every religion permitted to him. For the moment, nowhere. This woman was my mother. (And how many mothers there were!) This other one was a sister. (And there were plenty of sisters, too!) The others belonged to their husbands. (And they wanted nothing better than to belong to Cosma!)

"All these women belong to the house and are kept by their masters," he was told. "You must go outside to seek women—buy them and feed them with your own money, when you get money."

Cosma could not understand all this, and came to me.

"Ely, explain this to me. Why do they send me away? Do not we love the women of our own household better than we love strangers?"

"Yes, Cosma, you are quite right. The women of our own household are dearer to us."

"Yes, is not that true? Now, explain another thing to me. Since the women of our house are already fed by their masters and ask nothing better than that I should love them, why do they want me to waste my time running after women who do not even know me,

and refuse this pleasure to those who do know me and ask it of me?"

"You are right again, Cosma. Do not seek women outside. Refuse no pleasure to any one who asks it of you. Leave everything that you have to offer in the house where you are loved."

"That is meritorious! But still another question, Ely. They forbid me to approach women who cost me nothing, and tell me to buy others with my own money, when I get some money. Now, how am I to get money?"

"I don't know, Cosma. Perhaps you ought to go to the priest, the hodgea, or the Cârç-Serdar. They are all people who never do anything, and yet have money. They will be able to tell you."

Cosma went to question them. All three replied that one can only get money by working for it.

That answer enraged my brother. I, too, was angered, for those three men did nothing but play ghioul-bahar with my father all day long, while all the work on their land was done by the peasants of the beilic.¹⁵ Cosma took them at their word and went to his father.

"See here! Three of your friends, who represent authority and religion, insist that work alone brings money. Very well! I work for you, so you must give me the money necessary for the purchase and upkeep of three women. I need three women!"

Then my father spoke of his intentions.

"Yes, Cosma, you work, and your brothers work, and I, too, work; and all the gold that is piling up in the sendouk is being kept there for the future. You will find it all when I die, and you will be delighted."

Cosma interrupted him.

¹⁵ Drafted labour, imposed upon the peasants.

"Do not taunt me with future delights! I need three women—today! You say that I must buy and feed them myself. Then give me the money for my work!"

"But, my son, you are too young! Three women at nineteen? No, you must wait. . . ."

"I cannot wait. I must have them!"

He spoke truly. He really needed, I know not how many women. Three or six, perhaps; but I have with my own eyes seen all the women of the han come to Cosma, and all leave him happy.

That was his particular necessity.

But there were other requirements in the house. First, those of Kyra. According to my brother, these were overwhelming. She would not dress in anything but Asiatic silks, used only perfumes worth their weight in gold, and demanded a coach quite as luxurious as that of the Aga. Her charity alone amounted to ten ducats each month. Our father loved her and spoiled her more than his other children, but he cried out against such prodigality.

"You are driving me to ruin! Your expenses are greater than those of a bey's daughter, while your prayers to your Christian God are scandalous! I did not build up our fortune in that fashion!"

Kyra, who spent three-fourths of her time before her mirror, answered him over her shoulder:

"I don't know how you managed to gather our fortune for us, but since you have succeeded in doing so, I shall prove to you, for my part, that I am worthy of it. That which has come easily must go easily. You know what the Roumanians say: 'The miser's wealth always falls into the spendthrift's' hands.' Where there is too much gold, there are tears heavier than the gold

itself. I shall take it upon myself to see that your sins are forgiven, by spreading a little joy where you have sown desolation. That shall be my best prayer. And as for those prayers of which you say I am not prodigal, that is my only avarice; but God will not hold it against me, for He knows that my heart is generous."

Such were Kyra's needs.

Finally, there were mine. To speak accurately, they were not so much mine as those of justice. In my father's house I had all that I needed, for I did not require much. Food, a bed, and a narghilah—those three pleasures, so necessary to life, I secured without difficulty in exchange for my work. What I could not manage to secure so easily was the right to ignore the existence of a God who would not permit me to eat when I was hungry, and who insisted that I should sing praises to Him from an empty belly. It is true that this stupid and conceited God did not directly ask me to do that. My father, the priest, and the hodgea spoke to me in His name. I revolted against this, and therefore these three men were constantly punishing me, in the interests of their respective gods.

But these gods, who were so exacting toward me, seemed to have nothing to say against the cruelty of their servants, who committed the worst kind of injustices in their name. Forgetting that all men are equal before God, the churchmen enslaved the peasants of the beilic to the point where they were forced to work gratuitously half the year. The poor cojane groaned beside his beast. The priest counselled resignation, promised a better life in heaven, and ordered him to fast and pray.

The Zapciu, the government official whose duty it was to preserve order in this district, would send his

minions to steal the peasants' cattle; then he would have them "found" by these same rascals, and would make the peasants buy back their own cattle by forcing them to pay a part of the fictitious costs of pursuing the "thieves." Of course, the best horses and oxen were never recovered. To this crime God remained indifferent.

The Cârc-Serdar left with his *poteri*, which was composed of two hundred mercenaries, to pursue the *haïdoucs* who avenged the peasants. They were happy enough not to be able to find the *haïdoucs*, and, instead, fell upon the villages like a plague of locusts. They pillaged, raped, tortured, and threw several innocent communities into despair. Then they returned from their pranks to secure their pay and pick up their *tchibouck*, which they had abandoned when they set out on their expedition. God saw all this, but He did not interfere.

Then I hated this God and despised those men. In this respect, my own needs were many.

Cosma saw these injustices with but half an eye, and Kyra with but a single eye. The remainder of their sight was focused upon their own special needs. One day I begged them, for one moment, to forget the harem and finery, and contemplate injustice instead. They looked and shuddered. But a moment later their own needs were again uppermost in their minds. Cosma could not live an hour without his harem, nor Kyra without her finery.

I was left alone, and saddened. One is invariably unhappy when one is both right and alone.

Nevertheless, although the nature of our tastes separated us, we agreed as to the manner of satisfying them. We observed how the strong robbed the weak. We determined to rob the strong, no matter whom

they might be. We noticed a puzzling fact. While the weak divided themselves into nations and religions, in order to avert evil, the strong—the Turks, Greeks, and Roumanians—lived in harmony together and oppressed all, without making any distinctions. I was the first one to observe this.

The *poteri* was almost entirely composed of strangers, while the *Zapciu* was *neaoche* Roumanian, and even patriotic. Yet the *Cârc-Serdar* had no better friend than this *sbire*, who laid waste the country committed to his care as pitilessly as the chief of the *poteri*, who was a *bachi-bazouck*. Both of them had purchased their positions from the Divan of Bucharest with many purses of gold, and both had one object only—to plunder the country; to recover their investment, and enrich themselves as quickly as possible, for they knew that they were at the caprice of the central powers, just as the substance of the latter depended upon the complaisance of the Sublime Porte.

The bishop of the lower Danube, himself a bandit, intent upon high stakes, countenanced a certain number of monasteries that pillaged the country with that peculiar fury characteristic of monks wherever they embark upon the seas of crime. This bishop, who was deserving of the gallows, often came incognito to the boyar *Dumitraki Carnu*, at *Braila*, the owner of vast domains and a *sfetnic* in the Divan. Accompanied by the *Aga* of the town, these three would sequester themselves in an isolated wing of our *han*. Only the servants of the *Aga* were admitted, to bring them food and drink and the human flesh destined for their perverted passions.

The boyar *Dumitraki* was satisfied with girls of thirteen or fourteen years, preferably well developed.

But the Aga and the bishop, more difficult to please, had tastes requiring agemoglani.¹⁶ To be disembarassed of their victims' cries, they indulged their brutal lusts in the presence of servants who stood ready to stifle the slightest moan.

The girls suffered all that children of such age must suffer at the hands of a satyr like the counsellor of the Divan, who enjoyed a reputation as a worthy man and a fine father to his family. But the poor agemoglani must have cursed the day of their birth, for the prefect of police and the prelate, utterly perverse, required of them more refined stimulants. Thus the most atrocious tortures were imposed upon these victims. Most of the boys survived this calvary. One, however, dropped dead. Another lost his mind. A third leaped out of the window and was killed in the court.

It was this last victim that caused the scandal. We learned everything. Kyra was furious, and assumed the air of a heroine. She was no longer satisfied with robbing father and giving his gold to the needy. She insisted that we must avenge the victims in the blood of their torturers.

We deemed this no more than reasonable. Cosma, who was indulging, single-handed, in attacks upon travellers, abandoned this dangerous sport. For my part, I renounced the practice of pillaging the trunks in our han. I really did not need this terrible crime to open my eyes. Always, whenever I used my eyes at all, I had seen the strong wallowing in wealth, while the poor writhed beneath the whip. And it was to me, Ely, that all those came who had bruises to exhibit. It was I who ran about the countryside, listening to groans and staunching wounds.

¹⁶ Christian boy slaves, stolen by the Turks.

My brother Cosma and my sister Kyra likewise staunch wounds. But when one has oneself such great sufferings to nurture, one cannot be doing much for others. One cannot have one foot in Hell and the other in Paradise, nor harbour in one's heart both joy and sorrow at the same time. Between two visits of the women he kept, Cosma would listen to a peasant's tale of hardship. Then he would empty his pockets into the man's trembling hands, and the man would go away and be forgotten. Kyra, arrayed and painted like a Sultan's mistress, would drive about in her carriage, which was as beautiful as that of the Aga. But if, in the course of her drive, the story of some unfortunate wretch would bring tears to her eyes, I know that the distress of spoiling her make-up was equal to her sorrow for the miseries of the poor.

The monstrous acts which occurred in our han overwhelmed them both. Kyra devastated her apartment, wrecked her Venetian mirrors, and tore her robes. When her terrified father came running into the room, she hurled her jars of creams at him. For three days Cosma shut himself up in the cellar, barricading the door with barrels and flooding the floor with wine and brandy. As for myself, I did nothing. I remained in my attic and smoked my narghilah. Then we three decided to kill the bishop, the Aga, and the boyar. Kyra, garbed in black like a nun, called us to her room, and said:

"Look! I have destroyed all that was dearest to me. I shall wear no more coloured gowns nor put any cosmetics on my face until the day when those three monsters are dead. I shall help you. If necessary, you will go into the forest. I shall keep you supplied with money. And if need be, I shall follow you!"

Cosma, boiling with rage, replied:

"And I swear that I shall never again caress a woman until I have wet my dagger in the blood of those three brutes!"

It was so beautiful to see those two in a towering passion that I had not a word to add, and felt very stupid. I went back to my nargilah and waited.

There was nothing to do but to wait, for three lords, armed to their teeth, are not as easily killed as three turkeys. But though I could content myself with waiting, my brother and my sister could not. They came to me, the very next day, to remind me of our promise to wreak vengeance.

"Well, Ely, what are we doing?"

"We are waiting, Cosma. We are waiting for the propitious moment."

Kyra, still dressed in black, replied:

"And why are we waiting, Ely?"

"Because the bishop, the Aga, and the boyar, you understand, do not know that we seek to slay them. And when they find out, they will not come here to offer us their heads."

"An annoying business!" Cosma exclaimed.

"Most tiresome!" my sister added.

It was indeed both tiresome and annoying. My poor sister abhorred black dresses, while Cosma loathed being deprived of his women. I took pity on them.

"Go, my friends, and resume your normal lives. Nobody has obliged you to fast, pray, and mortify yourselves until justice shall have been accomplished. Nothing is more painful than to impose sacrifices upon oneself in order to achieve good. Too much virtue fills the heart with rancour, and rancorous hearts know not

the joy of sacrifice. Return, then, to your usual life. I am always the same."

They returned, and were contented. I it was who remained dissatisfied. Once again I was sad and lonely—lonelier and sadder than ever.

Still another man was dissatisfied—my father. He had become aware that, in our case, the Roumanian proverb did not apply: What is born of the cat eats mice. His initial act, following Cosma's and Kyra's vandalism, was to seek out a stern husband for Kyra. As for us, he did better still: we were placed under surveillance of the police. A pretty situation for a trio of revolutionaries, ready to take up war against the mighty!

I yielded to the impossible. No more staunching of wounds! Unfortunate people came to recount their woes to "Ely the Good." Ely had but scraps to offer them. Evil ruled, from the most cowardly poteri to the sfetnics of the Divan. Oh starless night! Oh groan-filled darkness!

I thus learned how wretched it is not to resemble one's father. I was more miserable than the slaves of the beilic, who suffered their own hardships, while I suffered for those of the world. And though I had a sister who wept at the recital of sorrow, and a brother who emptied his pockets into the trembling hands of the oppressed, the existence of the one, alas, was bounded by Persia's rags, while that of the other contained the lusts of all the stallions in the land.

No, one cannot be concerned with the wounders of others, when himself has great, humid sores to tend.

One day the abscess burst.

Cosma came to me.

"Ely," he said, "let us pounce upon our father and steal his gold. Do you agree? Kyra is willing."

"Cosma, I am with you. But what shall we do with the money? Shall we keep breeding-horses to make more subjects for the beilic? Or buy more rags from Asia? Shall we give a little alms here and there? And in the end have the Zapciu throw us all in prison? I have had enough of that!"

"No, Ely, no more of that! I, too, have had enough. And Kyra, as well. Father wishes to marry her to an ignoble cartwright, whose heart is as hard as ebony. Let us turn haïdouc! We shall avenge the injured, and live free until the day when we shall swing on the gallows. What do you say, Ely? I have ten men ready to follow me!"

I agreed. We embraced each other; we kissed our beautiful black beards. But I was not of the opinion that Kyra should accompany us. She must rather remain in the city, and inform us concerning our enemy's plans. That we agreed upon.

In order to jump on our father's back and secure the keys to the sendouk where he kept his gold hidden, we had to wait until he again had the toothache. At such times he drove the whole house mad. He dispatched all the servants to hunt up witches who understood fumigations and magic unguents.

One rainy day, in spring, he was again seized with his trouble. To remove any suspicion from our sister, we advised her to go to town as soon as our father began to howl. She went to console him. He sent her to the devil and called her a patcheaoura. When he saw us approaching him, he thought that we were coming for the same purpose, and shouted:

"Get out of my sight, you pezevengs! I do not need your pity!"

"Very likely not," said Cosma, "but it is certain that we need your keys!"

So saying, he tore them from our father's belt. The toothache was forgotten at once. He rose. Cosma, however, with his two hundred pounds, crushed our father down, gagged him, and bound him fast.

On the night of that memorable day, in the thickets of Dobroudgea, there were twelve of us to celebrate our rupture with the laws which protect only those who make them. A money-bag containing four okas of gold was to open up a new life to us.

Gold alters not the hearts of men. It made practically no change in our new life.

Cosma engaged in smuggling—a most remunerative business, for any one who wishes to risk little and to reap large returns. But that was hardly the life of a haïdouc. It is true that the relief which we were thereby able to give to the oppressed rendered the name of Cosma famous from one end of the Roumanian land to the other. Purses of gold were distributed, as rapidly as they came. Still, all that was only a makeshift. Not gold alone was needed to cure the malady of which the peasant was suffering.

To relieve the man who suffers is to render his suffering bearable. Cosma was unable to sense this truth. Neither were our companions, though they were the most interested in seeing the light. But what does it avail a man to suffer if he feels only his own suffering? His hurt once healed, evil ceases to exist for him. And thus our new life was hardly more than a repetition, with enlarged means, of the one which we had left.

During this time our young sister was chained to the brutal creature to whom our father had wed her. Her first child was a brute, like his father. My sister neglected him and removed him from her sight. Fortunately, a girl followed, very like her mother; and then a third child, a boy. These surrounded the unfortunate woman with a family harmonizing with her tastes.

They lived their own proper life, suffered for it, and came to grief—all three of them—because they would renounce nothing.

It is useless to tell you that, so far as I am myself concerned, my past gives me no right to style myself a *haïdouc*. We were *borfaches*.¹⁷ Our vengeance were small and mean, and much too personal and selfish. Nevertheless, we have one exploit to our credit—a single one, which we accomplished at the outset of our career. It gave us a good reputation among the common people, and I am proud of it because it was I who urged it upon Cosma. Listen!

At this period the ravishing of children was at its height. Of all the miseries which crushed the people, this crime was the one which they supported the worst of all. With a more or less bruised heart, the peasant endured his other misfortunes stoically enough—taxes, forced labour, whippings, rapes. But the kidnapping of these innocent shreds of his own flesh—that was worse than taking his life. Moreover, he realized the fate that was destined for the hapless children. I have heard tell of parents who left their huts like crazed dogs to go out in search of their lost child, and in their turn likewise disappeared.

In our province it was the Aga of Braila who was

¹⁷ Ordinary petty thieves.

the great capcaoune.¹⁸ His friend, the bishop of Galatz, shared his amusements and preferred boys to girls, while their third friend, the boyar Dumitraki Carnu, had, as I have already said, perverted tastes. The feast finished, the little victims were shipped to Tzarigrade. Mothers would fall senseless, imploring mercy, before the doors of these powerful lords. They were thrust aside like cumbrous packages.

How could one do other than become a haïdouc? I nourished against these three tigers such a hatred as makes the heart greet death with joy. Then, one day—two years after our rupture with the law and the Church—Kyra sent us these words:

“Tonight, in this place, children will shed tears of blood. Be haïdoucs! They fancy that you are far away, and do not fear you.”

We were, as a matter of fact, quite far distant from Braila, in the regions of the Turkish Babadag. It was nearly vespers when the messenger arrived with the news.

I glanced at Cosma. He seemed to vacillate. I bared my chest to him.

“Strike, Cosma!” I exclaimed. “You will see poison flow!”

Cosma rose and mounted his steed.

“Ho, haïdoucs, whose hunger is satisfied! Who will follow me ten hours without food? Who will risk his skin for a mother in the throes of terror? For children cursing the day of their birth?”

We were a score. Before Cosma had ended, we were astride our mounts. At cock’s crow we reached the moat surrounding Braila, after an arduous ride through swamps and brushwood.

¹⁸ Cannibal; used here, of course, in the figurative sense.

The han was deep in slumber. Not a light, not a sign of life. A fine rain, which had continued all night, soaked the muddy ground. The evil house was snow-white and, against the black background, showed like a spot of criminal purity on a field of celestial mourning. The high, projecting gables resembled the black wings of some sinister bird of prey sheltering its heinous brood, while the hardwood balconies stood out in bold relief against the white walls, like so many maws ready to disgorge a nest of evil Agas and abducting bishops.

Our han had never before appeared so sinister to me. I shuddered at the thought of having been born and raised in that house. The unhappy fate reserved for the children and the grandchildren of this father who wished to assure the comfort of his offspring by closing his eyes to profitable crime—was it not an act of divine justice?

We took the most stringent precautions. The han was situated at the corner of the plateau formed by the wide, semi-circular moat as it met the Danube at the Karakioi end. The horses were concealed in the moat and left in the care of four men.

Here, although the slope of the plateau is sharp, it has the advantage of being covered with furze and briar, which permit one to scale it by clinging fast with hand and foot. Our men hid themselves in the brushwood, on the side next to the wall of the house. In the distance the port slumbered. Only an amorous Turk sang his sad lay from the bridge of an invisible caravel. From that side we had nothing to fear. On the city side, however, there was great danger, for the Aga's police assiduously watched while their master diverted himself. Luckily for our enterprise, the bad weather aided

us. The cheaouches had taken refuge in a doorway and were trembling like wet dogs, feebly voicing their monotonous "Hep, hep!" But Cosma, with incredible audacity, boldly approached one of them and spoke a few words, dragged him over to another of his fellows, and whipped out his flask of brandy. We drank together. Then the two of us, in the midst of these wolves, continued our promenade through the quarter and gathered up several other night-watchmen, to whom Cosma spoke gaily and offered drinks. A short distance away, a Roumanian guard shouted his rallying cry:

"I see you! I see you!"

And Cosma answered, amid the laughter of the cheaouches:

"You don't see a thing! We're having a drink! Come over and join us! What do you say?"

The man came out of his ambush and, joining us, drank and laughed. Presently Cosma pushed open the door against which he had been leaning, and which was that of the house of a faithful friend.

"What do you say to warming up a bit? Would not that be better?" Cosma urged.

The five grateful guardians of the law followed us. We found ourselves in a large tinda, confronted by our old Ibrahim, who wished us all perpetual health. He threw several branches on the dying embers of the hearth and offered us tabourets and a big rogojina as well, for those who wished to stretch themselves out.

The heat and the brandy made their eyelids heavy, and soon their combined snoring ushered in life's sincerest symphony.

As we departed, the cocks crew for the second time.

To our deep regret, we were obliged to kill the night-watchman of the inn—a servant who had attended our birth—but this was entirely his own fault. Cosma had knocked at the main gate. The porter opened, holding his lantern uplifted. We threw a gheba over his head and advised him to keep quiet and allow himself to be bound. He refused and struggled. We had much ado to keep him from howling. Then Cosma, becoming angry, stabbed him.

“And we do not even know if the orgy is actually taking place! Perhaps it was postponed,” said my brother, broken-hearted at his deed. “Perhaps this crime was useless!”

It was not. The faithful porter was guarding a house in which still greater crimes were being committed. While we were occupied with the porter whom we had reluctantly been forced to kill, two of the Aga’s ferocious stewards fell into the hands of the men we had posted at the service entrance, on the other side of the main gate—which, for greater security, we had made fast. The two lefedgis of the perfect were already dead when we arrived. That was unfortunate, for we should have liked to have had some information as to what was happening. A third brute soon satisfied our curiosity. He was dragged into the briars and questioned. He was a Greek from Janina, and pretended to speak no other language. From him we learned that the Aga was likewise from Janina. We could not understand each other very well, but Cosma refused to believe that the reptile could not speak Turkish or common Greek. The points of our daggers justified Cosma’s conjectures. The wretch spoke excellent Turkish, and what he told us made our hair stand on end beneath our caps.

The debauch was nearly over, he informed us. One girl and two boys were lying unconscious on the floor. The Aga, the bishop, and the boyar Dumitraki, quite drunk, were calling for their coach to go to the prefect's residence to sleep. There were still remaining three other servants, whose duty it was to remove the three victims after their masters' departure.

The former shepherd of Janina implored us to spare his life, as a reward for his information.

"I am not at fault. I do what I am told to do, like so many others. I, too, have come to Wallachia to make my fortune. It is said among us that this is a country where a lemonade-vender can become a pasha, if only . . ."

"If only he is willing to stifle the cries of children, while the Aga tears their bodies! Yes?" I cried, seizing him by the throat.

He was the first wretch to be voluptuously strangled by my own hands.

As for the quarry we were after, we were obliged to wait a long time. Nobody else came out. We dared not invade the house. It would have meant running the risk of arousing an army of servants, and a regular battle would have ensued, with perhaps the whole *poteri* against us. We knew that the orgy would cease before dawn. The monsters never slept in the han, where every trace of their crime was carefully effaced by the next morning. We were therefore compelled to let the next servant sent for the coach pass unmolested.

We retired to the brushwood, whence we could watch the little service door, some thirty paces away. For more than an hour we waited in that freezing April dawn, our blood congealing in our veins. Finally a man passed on a furious run and disappeared. Was

he going for the coach, or had he been dispatched for the guard, his masters having become suddenly affrighted?

Regardless of the outcome, we decided to open fire, at the possible risk of being greatly outnumbered.

Our anxiety proved to be half justified. An escort of about a dozen mounted arquebusiers stopped before the exit and instantly surrounded the coach. We breathed more easily, and began to lay our plans. The seconds seemed interminable. Finally, the three satyrs filed past—three huge, shapeless masses of decomposition, wrapped in their choubas and dragging themselves along the path with the aid of their servants. The door closed on the last one and the equipage was about to start away, as ten score cocks splintered the dawn with shrill annunciation.

We leaped as one man to the edge of the plateau. Sixteen arquebuses were discharged into the group, followed by sixteen pistol shots. Three-fourths of the escort were unhorsed. The carriage unexpectedly described a lateral half-somersault and banked against a tree. In the rapidly defining twilight two mounted lefedgis and a man on foot could be seen running away at top speed. The others, dead or wounded, were strewn about the ground. His Holiness the bishop, the powerful Aga, and the "brave" sfetnic of the Divan, Dumitraki Carnu, in the twinkling of an eye, were hurled from their carriage and brusquely roused from their drunken stupor. Three running knots were passed round their necks. Then all of us, culprits and judges alike, scrambled pell-mell down the hill, our purpose being to regain our horses with the utmost dispatch.

Come, bruised parents! And you, children trembling behind your mothers' skirts! Likewise you, abduc-

tors who disgrace the image in which God fashioned you! Come, watch the wild haïdoucs ride along the muddy Danube banks, dragging these three lords of the earth behind their horses' hoofs! Peasants, leave your huts, and butchers, forsake your gilded alcoves! Regard these three dismembered once-powerful ones, whose eye-sockets, mouths, and ears are now stuffed with clay!

Vengeance! Blessed be thou for the benefaction that thou bringest to the hearts of haïdoucs!

THUS Ely concluded his tale.

He responded to the applause of his companions by bowing before Floarea Codrilor. Then he took up his caciula and covered his head. His face no longer resembled that of a martyr.

*THE NARRATIVE
OF SPILCA THE MONK*

“**T**HE floor is yours, Spilca! Remove the veil which conceals you from our eyes; open your heart without reserve: tell us of your life, your joys, your sufferings, and your hatreds!”

Spilca was not prepared for Floarea Codrilor’s invitation. He started, like a modest man who overhears an obscene jest. His round eyes, the colour of steel, gravely fronted the scrutiny of the others, but for a moment only. Then he turned his head toward the entrance to the cave, with a gesture of scornful perturbation. His mind seemed to be searching through the empty fog, while his square torso, clad in its monastical tatters, no longer appeared to breathe. His hands, resting on his knees, did not move; his legs and feet, rudely concealed in a jumble of obele and opinci, were similarly immobile. Spilca was with us only in his material being. Only his strong, cleanly cut profile, with its well-combed red beard and its shaven skull, were rich with life; only his head, half illuminated, betrayed the conflict which was taking place within his spirit.

Then, slowly, he turned his face toward the captain. His fleshy lips moved, but they were dry. His throat, choked with agitation, articulated incomprehensible sounds. This impediment seemed to trouble the haïdouc monk. He moistened his lips with saliva, and spoke firmly:

BEFORE I became Spilca "the Monk," I was a strong ploutache ¹⁹ on the Bistritza.²⁰ At that time my head was not bald. A beautiful, blond kica flowed over my broad shoulders, which, for their part, have not yet left me. I had no beard. My face was that of a young male virgin. My eyes had as yet no cause to close sadly at the appearance of a memory. My lips could laugh without fear. I was Spilca the ploutache.

From the point where the Bistritza becomes capable of supporting a raft down to its mouth, the whole length of the Moldavian shores were as familiar to me as my nose. The Bistritza, that proud and savage princess, envied by the Pruth and by the Sereth, was my beloved. Her bed is an inconstant cradle, full of rocks. Her shores are two undulating tresses, ever changing and full of surprises. Her bed annoys the mistress and tears gashes into her body. Her shores approach each other menacingly, crush her, strangle her, and cause her to cry aloud. Then, of one accord, they release her, and the most beautiful river in Moldavia, one of the most beautiful rivers in the world, stretches herself at her ease, gazing at her reflection in a sky that is worthy of her charms, and graciously smiles upon her children.

Spilca, the bold ploutache, lived the life of his mistress. When she was crushed and torn, then I defended myself with her in the whirlpools of the current, and we howled together. At other times, free and calm, we contemplated the blue sky, spread ourselves out in the sun and, passing here and there, took pleasure in everything about us.

All round us was a land blessed of the Lord—a

¹⁹ Raft pilot.

²⁰ A river in Moldavia.

veritable promised land. The ploutache's soul is ever ready to marvel, whether at the sombre, abrupt cliffs of the gorge where dawn's brush limns a thousand changing shades, or at the broad landscape, light-flooded, rich in prairies and flocks and undulating with hills and forests.

What joy one experiences, moving down with the tide! And when I returned through this country in the company of carters, my heart rose up with another joy, as great as the first. The wood was delivered; there was gold in my purse; my health was perfect. There was nothing to do but to walk along, eating and drinking and sleeping. What more does any man require?

Ah, my poor Spilca, why did you not continue in this happy existence.

I did not. I could not. One never can.

On the banks of the crystalline Bistritza, young girls washed their linen garments and, with full-throated vigour, chanted of loves both real and fanciful. There had always been such young girls there, washing linen. I viewed them with the eyes of an innocent youth; to me they were simply human beings, garbed in skirts instead of trousers. That was all. It was thus for many years. Calmly floating downstream, I would hail them. Most of them answered. Others would remain unresponsive and silent. Thus I passed.

One day I passed no more.

I was in my twenty-fifth year—good-humoured, healthy, and strong as a wild boar, for I lived on the water, drank wine, ate two okas of meat daily, and moved giant trees. My nose could bear no odour other than that of the woods.

One day a group of girls hailed me, before I had greeted them. I said to myself:

"Come, Spilca! Let us take a somewhat closer look at these things!"

And I used my pole in such a manner as to send the raft violently up against the shore. They all ran away with the linen or the wool which they had been washing—that is, all except one pretty little creature, who stood as high as three apples. She was so novel to my eyes that I could not cease looking at her. She had risen. Bare legs, a short skirt, a white waist, which she held tightly round her chest with her two hands, a blond head of hair, very small, and those great, deep, blue eyes, with lashes beating like a butterfly's wings—such were the things which I then saw, for the first time, in my Sultana.

She considered me frankly and fearlessly, which pleased me. Almost at once she spoke:

"You have not come to harm us. You are one of us!"

"To harm you? Of course not! You called to me, and I came!"

Sultana smiled.

"*They* cried out, like that, for a joke. It is tiresome to be all alone."

"But did not you call, too?"

"No. But I remembered you from last summer, and I did not think you meant us any harm. That is why I remained."

"There are bad ones, then?"

"Many—almost all of them!"

"Even among the ploutaches?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Well, I must be off. Only, first tell me your name!"

"I am called Sultana."

"My name is Spilca. And what makes you think that I am not bad, Sultana?"

"Because you keep to your road, and pay no attention to the calls of the women."

This answer vastly pleased me. I said nothing more, but pushed away from the shore into the current, while she smiled after me.

No sooner had I left than I felt no longer the same man. As soon as a single thought fills one's mind, then one is no longer the same person. My life had formerly been as calm as that of a tree, not one leaf of which has yet stirred. Now an unexpected wind had begun to blow. Even the aspect of the Bistritza had altered completely; I saw the world as if it were all in a picture. Its beauty was still there, as brilliant as ever, but I perceived it through eyes that were no longer my own.

I did not suffer. Even today I am still ignorant of that love-sickness which wrenches the heart. I loved Sultana, as a child loves a bird in the cage, devoting to it every solitary thought. That frail thing had dared to confront me alone—me, the brute who had thrown his raft so violently against the shore! And she had completely won me. She knew that I was not wicked. She was certain that I would not do her harm. The strength of her eyes had met the strength of my muscles, and had emerged from the encounter victorious. I was compelled to think of Sultana, and nothing else. Is it nothing to think of some one without loving, without suffering? Perhaps for others—for those who love and suffer easily. But as for me, it was a new experience. She agitated me to the very depths of my being. No sooner was I separated from her than I desired to see her again. A desire that effaced all other desires

haunted me, reversing the customary order of my life. I no longer awoke with a song; I awoke thinking of Sultana. I no longer beheld the trees, the beasts, the horizons—I beheld only Sultana. It was just the same whether I was at the source or at the mouth of the river, and whether descending or returning up the stream. A single point in the immense and beautiful world focused my thoughts: the place where was my Sultana. And another disquieting and unfamiliar thing now occurred: I began to be abstracted in the conduct of my affairs—a source of extreme annoyance, both to myself and to others.

Spilca was no longer a free man.

I hoped, for several weeks, that those blue, honest eyes might end by leaving me free. Futile expectation! That little blond head, remembered to its ultimate detail, haunted and pursued me. Then I said to myself:

“Well, Spilca, you cannot escape your fate. Sooner or later every man must strike against the pebble that is to divert him from his path. Let us seek out this pebble! We will ascertain the damage later.”

It thus happened that, toward the end of that summer, during the festival of Saint Mary, I donned my Sunday clothes and went prowling about Sultana’s little village, which proved to be a mountain hamlet snuggling in the hollow formed by two hills and traversed by a brook.

Not far away were spruce forests of immemorial age. The tiny cottages, white and with charming blue windows, were dotted round like white flowers on a field. Although the cottages were clean and gay in their fresh coats of whitewash, their moss-covered roofs of rotting planks betrayed the poverty of these peasants. That did not surprise me. We were then in that dread-

ful period of slavery and misery which characterized the end of the Turkish occupation. The regions protected by the mountains, at that, were the least touched by the despoilers' hands. Only he who forsook the society of his fellow men and, with wild animals, inhabited the mountains, could escape the beilic, the whip, and the burdensome taxes.

I arrived during the liturgy. The entire population was in church, and thither I repaired, praying like the good Christian that I have always been. That helped me. The priest and the deacon, each before his pulpit, read and chanted with spirit, amid a death-like silence.

I could not distinguish the faces of the congregation, for I had gone no farther than the entrance of the crowded church. I was thereby ideally situated when the services were ended, to discover my beloved Sultana. She was with a little old woman whom I conjectured was her mother, and was modestly garbed in a bodice and a little white skirt, fastened with a catrintza of black cloth, and without much embroidery. As she sallied forth, I anxiously nodded my head. She answered my nod, manifesting no surprise, betraying no emotion, frankness and unfeigned serenity in her mien.

A stranger's presence is always remarked in a small village. We had been observed greeting one another. That sufficed to start the whispering, winks, and gossiping at the very threshold of God's house. It tarnished the purity of my intentions and obliged me to take a definite stand.

I made a rapid decision. I would ask Sultana to marry me! That eventuality, somehow or other, is always ready to overtake a man. So be it, then! I set out in pursuit of the two women. They left the village, mounted a slope, and entered a house situated half-way

up the hillside and facing away from the mountain. During their journey neither of them had looked back. This token of their honesty encouraged me. I followed and knocked at the door. Sultana opened it.

She was not surprised to see me. This nonplussed me. She stood erect, even as she had done three months before on the bank of the Bistritza, and asked me the same question.

"Good-day, Spilca. What wind brings you to us? If your thoughts be honest, enter!"

"Honest? Sultana, I swear before God, I come to ask if you will have Spilca for your husband. . . ."

I saw her cheeks redden.

"Enter. . . . One does not ask for the hand of a girl on the threshold of her house!"

Then she spoke in a loud voice to the old woman.

"Aunt, this is Spilca, the ploutache, a voinic labourer from the Bistritza."

The aunt examined me with lack-lustre eyes and invited me to sit down.

"My aunt is deaf," Sultana explained, "and she is entering her second childhood as well. You will not be able to talk very well with her. The poor woman has for years been a widow. Three years ago her only son was killed in a brawl—an affair of jealousy. His whole life long, this boy had been the sole support of her old age. So she sold her house and came to live with us. At that time I still had my father and mother. They died in the following year. Since then we have been alone, and live by the labour of our hands. We just manage to exist. You see, Spilca, things are not so pleasant with us. And that is not all!"

I could not answer. She had narrated these not particularly pleasant details almost smilingly. I real-

ized, then, that I was dealing with a person endowed with a strong, mature soul, inured to misfortune, yet withal tender.

Upon entering, I had glanced round and noticed an orderly interior—not the ordinary peasant interior, that is either like a stable or else so spotless and severe that the visitor is ill at ease. Open doors permitted me to glance into two rooms communicating with the big tinda, in the centre, where peasant families spend their whole life. There were several huge, high beds, each with its striped counterpane, where yellow borangic alternated with white, and with lace falling to the ground. At the head of each bed was a sendouk painted in primitive style, crushed beneath a mountain of coverlets, sheets, and pillows. Everywhere, against the wall on the side of the bed, were embroidered cushions and heavy woollen carpets of multicoloured designs. Carpets of inferior quality also lined the floor. In each room a large mirror rested on a white wooden table, covered with cloth similar to that of the bedspreads. The chairs were of varnished wood. The pictures represented rustic scenes. In all the eastern corners were ikons adorned with sweet basil, each having a perpetual light burning before it. The ikons and pictures, as well as the mirrors, were decorated with long curtains with relief-work insertions, enriched with lace which was rendered imposing by the elaboration of its detail and by the abundance of the raw silk employed in its fashioning. The windows were hung with linen curtains almost as lovely as the table covers. And in each of these two large rooms stood a loom, with unfinished work on it.

In this house was to be found only what every peasant's home boasts, when actual misery is unknown.

Nothing more. But every object bore the impress of the hand that had bestowed upon the place an air of sweetness and cosiness seldom encountered in our peasant homes, where the furnishings of the clean rooms chill the guest, making him afraid lest he should disturb their prim order.

I felt at ease, as if I were again in my parents' home. They had died while I was yet a child.

I acquainted Sultana with my thoughts:

"Sultana, all that is lacking here is a voinic's strong arm. Here is that arm. Now everything will be happy!"

Her glance smote my heart.

"Spilca," she said, in a clear voice, "all our ills are not concerned with the trifles I have just mentioned, which are things of the past. There are other ills which I do not care to speak about. What good would it do? Those who, like yourself, have asked for my hand, are not better off than you. It is best to submit to fate!"

For a time I remained pensive. "My God," I mused, "what does it matter? The poor girl was probably once deceived by some vagabond, who laughed at her and abandoned her. Perhaps he even left her with a baby. That would make no difference to me!"

"No, Sultana! You must not think me so lacking in human kindness. I know that everybody is hard on a young girl. But I am not like the rest. If that is all there is to it, if that is the mistake which caused the others to withdraw, then we can conclude our engagement within a week—that is, if you are willing!"

When I had finished, I saw her sit up stiffly in her chair. Her flashing eyes blinked rapidly.

"Your suspicions are unjustified, Spilca! I have done no wrong; I have nothing with which to reproach

myself! At twenty-two I am still as my mother made me. The evil is greater than what you suppose—greater even than if I had a child from the flowers!”

I was waiting for her to say what this evil was, but she did not speak, merely regarding me with her frank eyes, limpid as an August sky.

The aunt called us for breakfast. Sultana took her hand and shouted into her ear:

“Aunt, Spilca asks me to marry him. What do you think?”

The old, white-haired lady, her back rounded, her face deeply pock-marked, pityingly considered me for a moment, and then replied:

“Too bad! . . . Poor fellow! . . . There is nothing to be done. Who would cross the path of the logofat?”²¹

“Who is this logofat?” I asked, “and what has he to do with the question?”

Sultana’s expression was clouded with bitterness. Her eyes grew misty. Her serene white brow turned livid to the roots of its tresses.

“It is the logofat Kostaki,” she said, in an oppressed voice. “Perhaps you have heard tales of his cruelty and misdeeds. Like all the dwellers here, we are dependent upon him. He can let us live, or he can kill us, as he chooses. And any young girl who attracts him cannot escape him. She has only her choice between dishonour and the ruin of her family. Two years ago I had the misfortune of attracting the attention of this brute. Since then I have had no peace. Until now I have managed to defend myself. But the peril is greater than my strength, for this man has neither heart nor shame. He is our master. One day it will be my turn to choose.

²¹ The supervisor of a territory, invested with unlimited authority.

My choice is made. For a time I hoped for a husband who would protect me. But none dares to affront the tyrant. Therefore, I am avoided as a pacoste.²² And, as for those who have come from afar to wed me and take me back to their own country, there is this difficulty. My aunt will not follow me. All her dead are buried here, and she wishes to rest among them. Now, Spilca, you know everything, except the details of this terrible situation. I thank you for your kind intentions. They would save me. But, as my aunt has told you, there is nothing to be done. I would be an affliction to you. And why should you risk so much, when I tell you that nothing can help me? Perhaps I am expiating some blasphemy. Very well, then, I must expiate it!"

In this sea of life the numerous rocks of the passage cause many people to take refuge in small boats, prudently hugging the shores. But Spilca—Spilca, the ploutache of the Bistritza—well knew the rocks and was not troubled. He preferred to be torn asunder by the waves than to perish with his nose in a puddle.

I am not indifferent to the various fashions of dying. I have my own preferences. And so, on the afternoon of the following Sunday, without hesitation, I proceeded to confront the rock which so many voinics had feared.

The proud Moldavian hora kept cadence to the sounds of three gypsy instruments. Thirty-odd girls, Sultana among them, and about a score of young men were there, perspiring a little because the sun was hot, but not particularly minding it. They held one another by the little finger only, and some of them even interposed an embroidered handkerchief, for greater decency and also in order to satisfy the parents, who

²² Misfortune.

were watching. The beautiful ring now darts to the centre. A voinic cries: "Mark time! Mark time!" Little feet and big feet beat the earth like pattering hail; rough hands pull delicate hands up above the head and then down below the knees. Then the circle widens, with a sudden movement that separates everybody and stretches one's arms. And now the human garland makes a few rapid steps to the right, and then goes round and round to the left. All feet "Mark time! Mark time!" A deep breath, and one begins again. That is the Roumanian hora. To love it one must be a Roumanian and a peasant. It is not difficult, and it is replete with joy and has more colours than the rainbow. Kerchiefs of white or yellow borangic, depending upon the type of silk-worms which these folk cultivate with more than maternal care. Bodices and skirts of linen, white as snow. Aprons of velvet or black wool. And embroidery and lace that have seen many tears and heard many sighs. Laughter and song, too, for one likes to alternate from tears to laughter.

Whether beautiful or plain-featured, or even frankly ugly, a young girl at the hora is always agreeable to the eyes of the young men. The girls are there to find husbands, while the young men are looking for women, rather than brides. Every mother therefore closely attends her daughter's every gesture and whisper. The boys are aware of this vigilance, which explains the handkerchief separating the hands. This may satisfy the parents, but actually it only serves to increase desire.

Clothed in an embroidered zaboune, with white itzari knickers fitted to the thigh, shod with polished iminei, and wearing a wide-brimmed felt hat from which flow parti-coloured ribbons, a young man is, in

the first place, very proud of his sex; he thinks of himself as a *voinic*, although he is only a *barbat*. To the girl who feels herself beautiful, that is gratifying. He makes an imprudent categorical promise, which costs him nothing, in response to her prudent and rather sly coyness. If this is sufficient, all the better. If not, he bows to the inevitable, harnesses himself to the yoke, builds a hearth, and becomes a stubborn guardian of morals, especially if he presently becomes the father of girls who, in their turn, go to the *hora* to find themselves husbands.

The *hora* is always held near a *carciuma*. That is very natural. One gets overheated and has to have a little glass. One drinks to gratify an honest thirst, or merely for display; but one always drinks. And while drinking, one talks, either because one has something to say, or, again, merely for display. Only the white-maned old men, sitting beneath the shade of the century-old walnuts, drink for memory's sake, talk because it delights them to do so, and contemplate, from a distance, the agitations of a life which no longer disturbs them.

All these things were taking place when I arrived. Immediately, inquisitive glances made me understand that the village had heard the news of my engagement to Sultana. In order to confirm the report, I went immediately to greet my future bride and her aunt, after which I went and sat alone at a table under the plum trees, and ordering an *oka* of wine, remained peacefully watching the dance and the talkative groups before the bar.

The latter thought themselves far enough away, especially considering the clamour of the *hora*, to gossip about me; but I was near enough to catch an oc-

casional remark. The company seemed ill-disposed toward me. Several insisted that *he* would surely come, and the *he* knows all about it. That *he* was the logofat Kostaki, my rock and the terror of the region.

I thought: "Let him come!"

He came. His galloping horse raised a cloud of dust on the road and made the crowd tremble. Every head, from the drinkers and dancers to the gypsy musicians, turned quickly and anxiously toward the horseman, who, upon reaching the hora, brought his horse to an amble. Every one admired the animal. I was frankly delighted with it. It was a steed worthy of a better master.

He was a small, dark man, with mercurial movements. He threw the bridle over the felled trunk of an acacia and went over to the young fellows at the bar. Every hat was raised in greeting. A group of satellites surrounded him and at once informed him of my presence. I turned then and looked straight at him, not in the least afraid. I really desired an open encounter.

The logofat stood on his thin legs and seemed to take no interest in what was being said to him. He did not speak, but now and then he cast hasty glances in my direction. Then, suddenly, I heard him say, significantly, in a raucous voice:

"Debauching strangers deserve to be hamstrung!"

My only reply to this direct challenge was to approach the hora, where a new dance had just begun, separate Sultana from her girl friend, and begin to dance between the two girls. That was a correct and permissible thing to do. What the logofat did was not.

It is commonly accepted that a young man entering a hora must never separate a girl from a man with

whom she has consented to dance. When there is no place between two girls, one cannot enter except between two men. That is an inviolable rule, respected by every one who is not looking for trouble. To everybody's surprise, the logofat Kostaki disregarded this established rule. When I was the least expecting it, a hand seized my wrist from behind, on the side next to Sultana. I turned round. The dance stopped. The gypsies ceased playing. The reptile, grown pallid, stood before me, scrutinizing me with a look full of hate. He spoke, in a choked voice:

"Permit me to enter!"

"Enter elsewhere!"

"I wish to enter here!"

"If you insist on entering here, take this!"

A quick movement of my knee to his stomach sent him sprawling. He groaned like a whipped animal; then fainted. Nobody went to help him. The bar was emptied. The women ran away. An old man exclaimed:

"That is going to bring trouble!"

I shouted to the musicians:

"Until next Sunday! I retain you to play for my betrothal to Sultana!"

And I went up to my friend's house. A mother leading her child crossed herself and exclaimed:

"May the Lord protect us from harm!"

That week there was surely no happier ploutache on the Bistritz than Spilca. The logofat had not shown himself in the village since the affair. Every evening I went to spend a few hours with Sultana; and every evening, when we separated, she would say:

"Spilca, I have no faith in the happiness of which we are dreaming. The dog will not permit it. And I am afraid that the curse must ever hang over me. . . ."

I looked into her burning eyes and kissed her sweet brow.

"Do not worry, Sultana! We will persuade your aunt to follow us to my house in the Soutcheava district. There we will be happy!"

She smiled sadly.

"You do not understand the hold that the dead have upon the living. She would more willingly let herself be buried alive than leave her graveyard!"

On the Sunday of our betrothal the barkeeper suppressed the hora, for fear of a scandal. After vespers I went to find the gypsies, to tell them to be in readiness for the family dinner which always follows the ceremony of the exchange of rings in the presence of the priest. The young men of the village drank and spoke without animation. Some of them were cautious enough to stay away. But others came up to assure me, in low tones, that the whole community rejoiced over the lesson which I had given to "that dog."

"*He* fears you. You woodsmen and ploutaches are free men, while we are bound. Your hard, savage life protects you from attack. We—we have chains round our necks. If, in the spring, the logofat chooses to give us a hectare of land for sowing, we must congratulate ourselves. Otherwise we have to be day labourers, and are allowed to work for him only. That is why no inhabitant dares to thwart him. Our most beautiful girls pass through his hands first. It is we who marry them afterwards—often with their bellies already filled by him!"

In the evening, seated at two adjoining tables spread with glistening cloths, a dozen relatives and friends, along with the priest, had tears in their eyes as I opened the box containing my gifts to my bride.

Thirty bobbins of gold thread comprised my beteala,²³ which was like a stream of fire round the little treasure which I had inherited from my poor mother—a pair of diamond ear-rings, two precious rings, two bracelets set with rubies and sapphires, and, particularly, a large salba²⁴ on which were strung three great leftes, two imperial Austrian ducats, four Venetian ducats, four poli, six Turkish pounds, and ten galbeni.

All those present were deeply moved, except the aunt, who was thinking of her dead, and my fiancée, who did not believe in the dream of our happiness. Sultana, dressed in white, looked from the box of presents to my laughing eyes and back again, like a dove not yet quite tamed. Every one tried to drive away her evil presentiments. The priest pronounced an ardent prayer, and blessed our impending union. At dinner every one joked. The gypsies played and told amusing stories. The godmother made Sultana exhibit her dowry. She obeyed mechanically. The buxom women threw themselves upon the sendouks; embroidered skirts and nightgowns, napkins, pillow-cases, sheets, coverlets, and towels were pulled out and passed round the room. Sultana hardly had sufficient courage now and then to smile.

Toward midnight, as I was taking my departure, I asked my promised bride:

“Why have you all these black fancies tonight, Sultana?”

“They are not black fancies, Spilca. I *know* that I will cause you unhappiness. I can see it coming!”

I pressed her against my breast. She nestled up

²³ A long fringe of gold thread or beaten silver, to cover the face of the bride.

²⁴ A peasant necklace.

to me tenderly. I felt a burning tear fall upon my hand. The sweet wind of the pines and the warmth of the August night surrounded me on my way home.

The last half of September warned the poor that the winter would be early and severe. It was on a cold, rainy afternoon that I arrived at a village about ten miles away from Sultana's village. After six days of absence I was fairly perishing to see her. I was laden with all manner of purchases for the wedding, which had been set for the first Sunday in October. During the month that had elapsed, Sultana had not altered in her demeanour. Caution, severity, lack of spirit, even coldness marked her every action. If I had not been certain of her attachment, I should have accused her of indifference. But I was sure that she was suffering. She would not venture a single suggestion to persuade the old woman to leave the country. All my own efforts in that direction were unavailing. The poor woman obstinately refused, pleading that she could not forsake her dead. I had resigned myself to destiny, in the expectation of her end, which could not be far off.

One encouraging sign was the complete disappearance of the logofat. Since the day when I had kicked him in the belly, he had not been seen by anybody. He was reported to be ill. Some maintained that fear kept him away. Only Sultana was sure that the "dog" was hatching up some frightful revenge.

"I fear everything. I am certain only of ill fortune, from whatever source it may come. I am sure that it will blight our happiness, and that it will be you who will suffer the most!"

These had been Sultana's last words when I left her on the previous Sunday. We were not to see each other until the Saturday of the ensuing week. My

long absence was necessitated by a big shipment of wood on the Bistritza, the settlement of some involved accounts, and the conclusion of my voyage, as well as the purchase of certain articles, difficult to secure.

Now I was returning up the countryside, along the shore. I was hungry. I was tired. Two giant wax candles, weighing three okas each, destined to be lighted at the religious ceremony, weighted me down terrifically. The beams which I carried daily on my shoulders had never seemed so heavy. The care which I took not to break the candles had, it is true, a great deal to do with my weariness. Although not given to superstition, that heaviness oppressed me. I recalled one of my mother's beliefs—that a marriage candle which grows heavy betokens unhappiness, and that the one whose candle is the most quickly consumed dies first.

At this moment I was prepared to give heed to all manner of inner voices. In order to dispel these sinister thoughts, I stopped at the little village to rest, to have a bite to eat, and cheer myself up a bit.

The innkeeper was a man with whose good nature I was well acquainted.

To the devil with superstitions!

Yes, to the devil with them! Nevertheless, things sometimes happen round one which lend increase to one's superstitions, instead of driving them away.

I opened the inn door. Inside sat six peasants and the innkeeper. The seven ceased speaking the instant they caught sight of me. I had, none the less, overheard their last remark:

"Poor fellow, he is the one to be pitied!"

I deposited my bag on the floor, and demanded:

"Who is to be pitied?"

The innkeeper approached me gaily:

"Good-evening, Spilca! How are your affairs?"

"Excellent, Lake. But tell me, who is to be pitied?"

"Bah! A little accident has happened in the district. Some cojane's wife has just broken her leg. Now he will have to do his wife's work."

"Hm," I said to myself, "it is odd that the others have nothing to say! And why do they look so at the candles, lying there on the long table?"

"Have you never seen marriage candles before? One would think you never had seen any, from the way you are looking at them!"

"They are so large!" a peasant said, avoiding my eyes.

"Yes, quite. . . ."

"And heavy, I suppose?"

"Very!"

There was not another word from any of them. I strove to swallow a piece of bread. I tried to swallow a mouthful of wine. Neither would go down. I rose and left.

Outside, it is almost dark. I am rested, but the candles are heavy again. I shift them from one arm to the other, but find no relief. Two miles more to the house. The road is deserted and muddy. My ears buzz—a sign that some one is speaking ill of me. I open my jackknife and suspend it along my left thigh. But it is certainly tiresome to be spying round continuously. At every step the knife, hanging on its leather thong, strikes my thigh. It seems to me that it is going to dig a hole there. I close it and put it back in my belt. At that moment a black ram, as black as the night out of which it comes, crosses the road two steps ahead and

disappears. And though I know that it is a he-goat like all other he-goats—a real one, which is doubtless being sought far and near by its owner—I say to myself, aloud:

“It is the devil!”

I raise my right hand to cross myself. My hand is as heavy as lead. I say to myself:

“It was indeed the devil! It is he who is preventing me from crossing myself! And these candles are becoming so heavy! I do not know how I shall manage!”

I want to open my knife again, but my thumb is too weak to conquer the resistance of the spring. Another sign of the presence of the impure one! And the night is so dark that my eyes ache.

Finally I put my sack on the ground and lean my candles against a tree by the side of the road. Then I realize that I have taken the wrong road; one which runs parallel to the right one. The trees lining the road are poplars, naked and straight as candles. More candles! A whole road bordered with them! Sad candles, unlit, extinguished, and black!

“This,” I say, “is my last night on earth! My life is finished! I shall not die battered by the wild waters, like a brave ploutache. I shall die of fright, like a baba!”

At last I manage to open my knife and to cross myself three times. Then I pick up all my belongings. I tramp through the mud of a field, cutting through to regain the right road. Suddenly two shining eyes advance toward me. I feel my heart stop dead. I drop sack and candles, and cry out:

“Mama-a-a!”

A "Ba-a-a" answers me. The shining eyes disappear.

Late at night, sweating and mud-covered, I arrive. Sultana's house is brilliantly lighted. Many candles are burning. From afar I can see the open tinda crowded with people.

"That's it!" I say. "The aunt is dead. Now I understand all those signs of misfortune on my way!"

I was mistaken, for the old woman was there, dry-eyed, standing in the big room—busily piling more finery upon my promised bride, as she lay there upon the two joined tables with their glistening cloth, adorned in her bridal gown, more beautiful than ever before, within a frame of candles whose vacillating flames illumined her pale, white face, caressed by the fingers of death. Never again would her long lashes beat like the butterfly's wings. Never again would I see her clear, candid eyes. A garland of citron blossoms crowned the pale forehead, on which I had hoped, the next Sunday, standing before the altar, to press the sacred kiss. Her hair had been loosened and parted, and now flowed down the sides of her rigid body, mingling with the golden thread of the beteala. Between her two hands, clasped upon her breast, was the handkerchief with the pieces of money demanded by the "tax collector" who opens the door to the Beyond. Above her was the shroud.

And I, Spilca, stand near the door and, like the others, look on!

"It was written," said the aunt, "and the poor girl knew it. She was expecting it. And so, the day before yesterday, in the evening, while she was gathering hay in the fields, he came suddenly, dragged her into

the woods, and had his way with her. My little Sultana could not bear the shame. During the night she somehow managed to melt the phosphorous off eight boxes of matches, and drank the poison. Last night, after vespers, she died, refusing to drink the milk which would have made her vomit. It was written! So, at least, she rests beside her parents. Perhaps they were calling her. The dead do not like to be alone!"

Then the old lady took the marriage candles, unpacked them, lit them, and placed them at the head of Sultana, whose face became still more white as the two great flames shed their dazzling light over the room. Then, kneeling, she pronounced, with a firm voice:

"Our Father, who art in heaven . . . Thy will be done!"

All of the peasants joined in her prayer. I alone remained standing, saying nothing, gazing at my bride as she lay there, bathed in light.

For six days I had been living like a savage beast in the thick forest which bordered the seignorial konak of the domains of the lower Bistritza, where ruled supreme the logofat Kostaki—the butcher of Sultana, and of many another. I could not contrive to encounter him. I do not know whether I ate or drank or slept. I know that my clothes were in tatters; that my hands, feet, and face were bleeding from running through the bushes night and day, from one road to another.

These regions were far distant from the scene of the crime. The logofat did not fear anything here. It was the forest through which he passed on his round of timber inspection, always alone, on horseback, armed with pistols. I had, for my solitary weapon, my

boiling blood crying out for vengeance. My knife would not suffice me. In order to bring my man to my bare hands, I had a rope, which I kept in readiness to stretch from one tree to another.

The sixth evening was the eve of the first Sunday in October—the day on which my marriage with Sultana was to have been celebrated. Instead of being in the flush of the happiest day of my life, I stood in a ditch, with the rope in my hands, straining my ears to catch a sound—a creature without a soul, without a God, without a hope. There were moments when I no longer knew who I was. A cry or the beating wings of some nocturnal bird would for a moment restore me to my balance. At such times my first idea, my solitary desire, was to seize him. I imagined him as approaching, at a trot or gallop. My rope, stretched at the height of the horse's knees, withstood the impact. I fell upon him. What a hideous death I had prepared for him!

“O Lord, if You exist and if You observe injustice, let me drink this cup of cool water! Then I shall shut myself up in a monk's frock and live only to sing your praises!”

Thus I prayed that night, and God granted my prayer.

The place that I had chosen for the execution of my purpose was exceedingly propitious. Before the road became flat and suited to rapid progress, it first described a zigzag, which was steep and narrow, and rendered the more difficult by a stream. Here a man on horseback is obliged to dismount and walk on foot for some two hundred yards. At such a time I could recognize any man, even in the darkness; for I did not

wish to kill an innocent person, although I was certain that the only horseman likely to pass here was the logofat.

A foggy twilight fell softly over the oaks of the forest. I was listening, hidden in my ditch, to the murmur of the brook, when I heard a trotting horse suddenly pause before some obstacle. The horseman dropped to the ground. The horse sneezed. I jumped up, my heart pounding with joy. In a few steps, by difficult short-cuts, I endeavoured to approach close enough to distinguish the short height of my opponent; but the man, whoever he was, was completely hidden by the beast, which he let walk unled while he kept himself on the side the farthest from me. The night became more dense as we proceeded into the thickets of the giant trees. It was absolutely necessary that I should recognize him at this point. Once beyond the obstructed road, he would escape me. What could I do to retard him? The least imprudence on my part might be fatal to my design.

"My God," I thought, "is it possible that You are the protector of butchers?"

Hastily I snapped a dry twig. The crackling halted man and beast. For a moment they remained glued to one spot; then they began to descend again. I was no further advanced than I had been before. Following closely, I began to descend the path behind them. But this delay had permitted them to outdistance me. I lost my head. Thrusting two fingers into my mouth, I let forth an ear-splitting whistle. A pistol shot was the answer. A curse followed. I recognized the voice of the logofat!

Now I was reassured, and happier than any man had ever been before. Like a tiger, I bounded down to

the bottom of the road and stretched the rope across, grasping it with strength redoubled by hate.

The seconds seemed eternities; the night, hell itself. Then, as I waited, I heard my enemy approaching on foot. He was not on his horse; he was advancing, step by step, feeling his way, and leading his horse by the bridle—with his pistol, no doubt, held in readiness! Pitiless God! I had not foreseen that! He would surely discover my rope. Then, farewell to my revenge!

I tore away the rope and flung myself, face downward, across the path.

There you are, logofat! Discharge your pistol into my head; send me to meet my Sultana! But if you miss, may God take pity on you!

My ear fastened to the ground, I listen to the cadenced hoofbeats of the approaching horse. Then I distinguish the footsteps of its master. My arm covered my face. I could not see anything any longer. I no longer even breathed. I lived through that second when the convict awaits, with his head upon the block, the descent of the sword. It was not death that I feared, but only that the logofat might suddenly flee.

He reached me, and stopped. One step, and yet another step. . . .

His hand grasped mine. He raised my arm and said:

“Ho, there! Are you dead, or wounded, or only drunk?”

I made no answer. With a single bound I had encircled his body and his arms. I tightened my hold. We were face to face, breath against breath, both of us on our knees. He was shouting for help as I heard his bones crackling. His voice diminished. His torso splintered at last like a plank, and bent backwards.

The monastery of Pantelimon, on Mount Athos, is a fortified casern, harbouring six hundred monks. It was founded by the Empress Catherine II of Russia. On the day of its inaugural, even its patron was not permitted to enter these precincts, where the feminine sex is proscribed even to the female of beasts and fowl.

The monastery is a fortress. There are cannon there for the defence of Staretz, its military staff, and its treasures. There are frocked soldiers called "brothers," who tremble, like all soldiers, in the presence of their superiors. Those who are stupid and pious, as I was, cut the wood, catch the fish, prepare the oil and olives, tend the vines, fatten the capons, and pray for their own salvation and for that of the more intelligent ones who discuss the existence of God, drink everything, eat everything, and go to Kareia, where there are discreet women who will assuage their virility, or else attend to this detail among themselves, in a comradely fashion. Those who cannot do likewise, mortify themselves in pious solitude. All aspire to the Redeemer's pardon, and He grants it to all alike, for He is the crucified.

It was there that I became a haïdouc!

*THE NARRATIVE
OF MOVILA, THE VATAF*

“MOVILA, our vataf!”

“Here, captain!”

“Speak!”

“What, I?”

“Yes, you! You are a member of our military staff. Why did you become a haïdouc? Speak, in your own behalf and in behalf of our companions, for you are nearer to them than we are, and they are nearer to you than to us. Your story must be much the same as theirs. Speak, Movila! . . .”

A murmur of satisfaction passed through the assembled haïdoucs at this mark of our captain's consideration. They tossed back their caciulas with a jerk of the head. Their faces grew brighter. Movila rose, slightly timid, slightly awkward, but nevertheless striking as an example of typical Roumanian beauty, with his tanned face, his resolute look, his shaggy eyebrows reaching from ear to ear, and his exceedingly vibrant chin, mobile with energy. Our vataf certainly presented a striking figure, especially by reason of his enormous nose, which, in moments of danger, would dilate and front the air like a trumpet. Below his bushy moustaches was a mouth that seldom laughed. In the middle of his forehead a deep furrow persisted even in his sleep, so that the haïdoucs said of him that he was continually dreaming of *poteri* and of revenge. This assertion, whether true or false, left Movila unmoved. No one could boast of knowing his dreams or his

thoughts. He was punctual, reserved, and obliging. Movila never offered his opinions until he was assured that he was not addressing the wind. Rather than exchange confidences, he would have preferred to do the wash of the whole company—a miserable task, which invariably put the men into an ill humour.

Our curiosity to hear his tale was therefore all the greater.

I BECAME a haïdouc in spite of myself.

My family were mosneni²⁵ at Stanesti, near Giourgiou, where I was born. My father had inherited from his parents more than thirty pogons.²⁶ Nothing that belonged to a small gospodaria was lacking: cattle, vineyards, orchards, and patules full of corn and fowl. That was because my grandparents had had the good fortune to live under a lord such as one rarely encounters upon this earth. I myself was acquainted with this influential dignitary in his old age, when I was about fifteen years old. He was a good and God-fearing man. Although he was one of the protipendada descendants of an ancestor who had fought under Mircea the Old, he took pleasure in stepping into the thatched cottage of a peasant, conversing with him, meeting his family and his children, and in himself baptizing dozens of the latter every year.

I am his god-son. Movila was the name of a brother of his own, who had died of cholera. I dare say that he loved me as if I had been his own child, for I resembled his brother both in appearance and in character. A group of us boys and girls, whether his god-

²⁵ Small rural proprietors.

²⁶ Fifteen hectares; about thirty-eight acres.

children or not, would regularly go to wish him a happy New Year, carrying sorcova.²⁷

He would welcome us all, his handsome, kind, noble face suffused with pleasure. The whole company would dance about him, brushing him with the wreaths, and crying like hungry little dogs:

Sorcova, morcova,
Long may you live, growing old,
To a ripe age,
Like an apple tree, like a pear tree,
Like a rose-bush, and as rich in years!

He stood erect, like an oak, in the midst of our riot, in his spacious vestibule, which our snow-laden opinci had dirtied; and, lifting his arms to heaven, jovially defended himself against this avalanche of good wishes, shouting in his turn:

"I, too, my children, wish you good health and well-being, and many long years to live!"

Then he would call his kelar:

"Go, stuff their bags with nuts and carob beans and crackers!"

Finally, seated on his divan, he would make us pass by him, one by one. He would caress each of us in turn, and put a galben of gold into our little frozen paws. That was his New Year's gift.

At that time a galben was no great rarity in the families of peasants. Nevertheless, this galben was preserved by every peasant as if it were a relic.

I often had occasion to see how sincere was the interest which this generous-hearted boyar took in the private life of his peasants. He could not endure a habitual drinker, but knew how to forgive magnani-

²⁷ Wreaths of artificial flowers.

mously. And when some farmer had ruined himself, he would take care of the poor wife, and give the man a good strip of his own land, some cattle, and the tools necessary to make up a *gospodaria*. He carried on a war without mercy against the bar-keepers. And debts contracted with them by peasants he would annul in a most summary fashion. And if one of those birds of prey engaged in illicit speculation, he would send a *moumbachir* after the fellow, and have the soles of his feet beaten with the terrible *topouz*.²⁸

Shortly before his death, this generous lord came to pay us a visit—his last. We were celebrating the first anniversary of the birth of the sixteenth child in our family. All sixteen of us were then alive.

This child was also his god-son and, according to custom, my father had informed him that the child's hair was to be cut for the first time—the distinction of performing this operation being reserved, by usage, for the god-parent. He had been so advised, as was customary; but, in view of his many occupations, it was not expected that he would be present. To our great joy, a courier came galloping up to announce that the boyar insisted on personally cutting the hair of his god-son.

The celebration was thus a double one. My mother, aided by her four grown daughters, set the household and the kitchen at work. The happy rascal was washed, combed, dressed like a doll, and had his nose wiped at the last moment. His god-father came, laden with gifts. He was received as if he were the *Voda*.²⁹ Father presented his collection of six daughters

²⁸ A metal-sheathed club—an instrument of punishment employed during the Occupation.

²⁹ The ruling prince.

and ten sons, of whom the eldest was twenty, while the last one was held in his mother's arms. Two sisters and two brothers were twins. Twelve out of the sixteen were god-children of the boyar.

At table my mother was so happy that she uttered stupidities, stepped on the boyar's caftan, and upset his glass. The good man then spoke these words, which have ever since remained in my mind:

"Stand in dread of no mortal, no matter whom he may be! All of us, whether boyar or opincar,³⁰ are equal in the next world. On earth one man is as good as another. And if Peter holds the scepter while Paul bends beneath the yoke, it is not because God wills it to be so, but because man wills it—man, who is cruel, unjust, and avaricious. Against that kind of man we must revolt; we must crush him, if need be at the cost of our lives, for evil is not the work of God!"

I had occasion to think of these words not later than a month following the death of this lord. His only son and heir came from the foreign country where he had been living and took possession of his estates. He was the cruel, unjust, and avaricious man of whom the deceased boyar had spoken.

At the time of his first visit, we were still in ignorance of what manner of man he was, and received him with all the honour due to the heir of a lord who was regretted by one and all. He passed by disdainfully in his carriage, held us at a distance, and did not even speak to the old men; much less shake hands with them, as his father had used to do. He was accompanied by an ispravnic, who answered all his questions, while the new boyar made notes in a little memorandum book. The result was that the haraciu, which every head of

³⁰ A peasant wearing the opinca sandal.

a family has to pay to the pasha of Roustchiouk, was doubled.

This haraciu had become like a tradition, passing from father to son. The old boyar had gathered our quota, doubled it out of his own pocket, and sent the whole amount to the tyrant on the other side of the Danube, so that he would leave us in peace. Because of this, we never suffered those vandalisms and depredations which desolated other Danubian regions which had failed so to make peace with the potentate.

It was understood, of course, that no boyar paid a haraciu, whether imperial or national; nor, for that matter, any other tax. It was well known that boyars were exempt from all such fiscal obligations. But no sooner had our rich protector taken half the haraciu upon himself, than all the peasants accepted this generosity as though it were but an act of simple justice. After all, why should those who have only thirty pogons of land pay all the taxes, while one who has thirty thousand pogons is not required to pay for any kind of haznas, large or small? That righteous man, our former boyar, had considered likewise. And thus the happy life of our parents had been shared by the most miserable inhabitants of the district, down to the very gipsy slaves who worked on the masters' lands. Those poor devils, although bought and sold like cattle, were humanely treated. The boyar severely punished all who abused them; he took precautions to see that their food was healthful and sufficient; he lent them money, when they were sick. And this brings to my mind a particularly moving scene.

For some time an epidemic of fever had been raging. One day, as I was going to the konak to borrow a wheelbarrow, I came up at the very moment when

the boyar was examining the condition of his slaves. Naturally, during this epidemic, most of the gipsies had reported themselves as sick. In order to trap them, the logofat resorted to a trick which never fails. He offered them brandy, knowing full well that a gipsy never stops drinking until he is dead. Those who were feigning illness invariably fell into the trap, and were dispatched back to work. But in the presence of the boyar the logofat did not dare to employ this device. A stupefied gipsy was sunning himself, with his head between his hands. At our arrival he threw himself at his master's feet.

"What ails you?" the boyar asked.

"I am sick, my lord."

"He is not sick. He is pretending!" said the logofat.

"I am not!" cried the slave. "If you think that I am, offer me some rakiou to drink, and you will see that I won't drink it! I am speaking the truth!"

The sincerity of the man in offering this supreme proof touched the proprietor.

"Would you like me to free you?" he asked the gipsy.

"Free me!" the fellow exclaimed, in distress. "What, you would dismiss me, master? Where should I go? It would be like jumping from the lake into the well."

The boyar shook his head and walked away.

"We are a sorry lot," he said, as if to himself. "An animal, set free, will manage well enough. But a human being can only sell himself again!"

This was the man to whom ten communities and even a whole province owed their prosperity, at a time when our country was at the lowest point in all the

long history of its suffering. This boyar was one of the last to deserve the name of a Roumanian. He loved his nation, lived in its midst, and participated in its joys and in its miseries.

The heir did not follow in the footsteps of his father. He thought that we were too happy. Although he was rich enough to be able to eat gold with a spoon, his cupidity was not satisfied. He was a foreigner at heart. He could hardly speak our language. The depraved life which he had lived in the west had left marks of putrefaction upon him. He followed the example of those others, whether Roumanians or foreigners, to whom the peasant is no more than a beast of burden.

At the alarm raised by the doubling of the hara-oiu, the old counsellors of the region met at the house of the priest of Stanesti. I was there, although still a beardless youth; and I can see them now, as though it all happened but yesterday, with their sober faces framed in flowing white locks that reached to their shoulders. They announced to us that our time of peace and happiness was at an end.

"Sell your cattle. Sow no more than is strictly necessary. Build big coviltir wagons, like those of our ancestors, and hold them in readiness to yoke four stout oxen to them and to load them with your families and all your most precious possessions. You young people must take to the mountains once again. Those who remain behind will be led into slavery. We old men will go to our eternal rest. May God's will be done!"

God's will was indeed done! The new proprietor farmed out his domains to a Greek, who became the scourge of the province. In less than a year, all the

local governing bodies, composed of men of the country, were replaced by a swarm of phanariotes, more avid than the lice of an abandoned house. They were like a plague of locusts at harvest time. Livid faces with bloodshot eyes came every day to our doors and frightened the women and children. Always accompanied by armed lefedgis, always bearing some ordinance from the prince, these vultures traversed the communities, extorting the payment of all kinds of new taxes: taxes on large and small domestic animals; taxes on wine and spirits; taxes on each bushel of wheat. Then, taxes on fruit trees, on the right to fish and hunt, on the silk-worms, the bees, the wool-crop, the oil, the windows, and the chimneys!

The cattle disappeared in broad daylight. Then the poteri made their appearance, ostensibly to catch the thieves. We had to give them food and board. Our most beautiful daughters were ravished by these brutes. We sent our complaints to the Divan. The bearers had their bones crushed under the topouz.

Then, for the first time, we learned that this reign of terror, which had only now come upon us, had for many years prevailed throughout all the other provinces of the Roumanian land, whether under the governorship of Greeks or Roumanians. If we had been left in ignorance of all this, it was solely by reason of the efforts and moral authority of our former gospodar. His son, having become a member of the Divan, dealt in the blood and sweat of his own nation, sold offices at auction, and gave the purchasers absolute freedom to reimburse themselves by whatever means they might. Moreover, his farm overseer, in complete accord with the attitude of his master, ploughed up our land, mocking our boundary stones and charters. He

well knew that any complaints which we might send to the Divan would be answered by the topouz.

At the end of three years, our judetz had become unrecognizable. Terror alone had accomplished more ravages than epidemic, draught, fire, and blood together. The inhabitants of the district had cut down and burned almost all the fruit trees. The song birds and storks disappeared. Only the droning of the bees was heard. One no longer saw immense white beds covered with thousands and thousands of silk-worms, busily gnawing at mulberry leaves. Gone were the herds of cows that had formerly come home at evening from the pastures. There were no more happy weddings, lasting eight days. No more baptisms, when even strangers passings by were invited in to share the roast turkey and the wine. No more charity, now. All those nights of autumn, when we children helped to roast the green ears of corn and listened to the crickets, were changed to nights as sombre as a death-watch. When he had lost his land and seen his family dishonoured, even the most sober peasant took to drink, and passed his time in the public houses which had sprung up like mushrooms after a rain. The topouz, formerly reserved for extortioners, now almost every week crushed the bones of some one of our neighbours who was unable to pay his debts, and who was thenceforth condemned to drag himself along on crutches for the remainder of his life. Others were strung up by the feet, head downward, and smoked above red peppers thrown on a brazier. Hot eggs were put under men's armpits. The ends of their fingers were pinched, and thorns were forced under their fingernails.

Our family was reduced to half its former size. Since we were supposed to be rich, the pagan urgia

threw itself upon us with the fury of vandals. My father expired under the topouz, a torture aggravated by asphyxiation with green peppers. My three elder brothers were killed while defending our father. Two of my sisters disappeared, without leaving a trace. Two others were ravished and violated, and returned home, six months later, to die of consumption. The youngest boy was accidentally drowned. Thus, at twenty, I became the head of the family, surrounded by five brothers, two sisters, and a mother who wept both night and day.

Then the greatest of all the misfortunes that can smite Roumanians overwhelmed us. We had long been expecting it, in fact, on account of our inability to pay the haraciu to the pasha at Roustchiouk. The Turkish hordes were let loose by the tyrant, and invaded the countryside.

You well know that the Roumanian peasant has a great deal of the dog in him. To be kicked about and to have nothing to eat for days does not make him utterly despair, provided that he still has his home remaining. It may be a cold and desolate house, without windows, and with an unfenced yard—a pitiful and hopeless abode. But there he likes to remain, pottering about, and hoping for the future. It is his nest. And the day when fate forces him to leave this nest of memories, and compels him to go out into the world—even if it is only into the world of his own folk and tongue—upon that day he loses his faith in the God of his fathers.

One sad, April morning, amid the silent fields untilled by man and deserted by the lark, a ragged, bare-headed man came galloping up and cried out to the people:

"Christians, fly for your lives! Make haste! Since dawn the Turks have been crossing the Danube, at Zimnicea, and they are coming this way! On their course they pick up everything that is left, kill the men, dishonour the women, and set fire to the houses! Spread the news and flee! I am going back to my home. Woe betide him who is not among the bejenari⁸¹ by nightfall!"

The despair of the peasants could not have been greater, had they been told that the waters of the Danube stood as high as their houses and were rushing to engulf them. The women ran to their children. The men lifted up their clenched fists to heaven.

"Merciful Lord! What sin have we committed, that You should visit upon us such a misfortune!"

The church bells began to toll without ceasing—a plaintive knell, that mingled with the wailings of the women, the cries of the children, the curses of the men, and the yelping of the dogs, frightened by the panic of their masters. Pigs and fowl were slaughtered for the preparation of provisions. In huge cauldrons, the marmaligas of the fugitives was boiled, with very little salt, in order to fend off thirst on God knows what roads that might afford no water. Meanwhile, the women mingled their salty tears in the cauldrons.

Many homes had no male, or else only a crippled one. We had to assist the women with their loading. The most fortunate were those who no longer had a beast or cart to be loaded, and no possessions to weigh them down. They had only their knapsacks and their sticks to take.

The village presented a singular spectacle. Every house was being emptied, as if threatened by fire, al-

⁸¹ Fugitives.

though not a house was burning. Wives incapable of renouncing objects which had cost them so much pain and labour, loaded the wagons too heavily. Their husbands flung aside what they deemed to be superfluous. Quarrels ensued. Many women were beaten. The priest ran from house to house, encouraging the weak, calming the violent, urging on the sluggards. He was an old man whom sorrow had often tried, but he had always remained noble-hearted. And upon this day, he was as a messenger of God. Bare-headed, his white hair gathered up into a knot, his cassock tucked up so as to leave his legs free, his face glowing with the fire of his belief, he ran from one end of the community to the other, shouting aloud in every courtyard:

"Accept what heaven sends us! This is the Passion Week. Remember the sufferings of our Lord! I am accepting it all along with you! I am not leaving you! I shall be at the head of the bejenari, on the road to our Golgotha!"

And there, indeed, he was.

At noon the convoy got under way. At the head was the priest's wagon, which was now to be our travelling church. In front of its hood was suspended the cross which, for sixty years, had hung in the prelate's room. The worthy dignitary, clad in his chasuble, with a censer in one hand, and in the other the jewelled cross of the church, gave the signal to depart by going to the head of his robust oxen and walking in front of his snow-white beasts. His only son, whose coming into this world had cost his mother's life, guided the oxen by means of a rope passed round their horns.

The pedestrian bejenari, with knapsack and stick, followed the sacerdotal chariot. Then came the wagons containing families whose heads were invalids, and the

wagons of the widows and orphans. Finally, those of the more fortunate families, each boasting several strong men, brought up the rear.

Every wagon was crowded and loaded down to the breaking-point. Along with his own baggage, every one had assisted some less fortunate neighbour by agreeing to carry either blankets or clothes, sendouks or bags of meal. On the upright posts of every wagon were hung ears of dried corn—food for the dogs, in case there were nothing better to give them. Unlike the cats, who sensed no peril and remained in the empty houses, the dogs were agitated, seeming to understand the weight of the disaster. They had followed their masters. Now, tied beneath the wagons, they walked sadly, their heads lowered, their tails beneath their legs, their ears deafened by the squeaking of the axles, which were all badly greased, despite the pots of grease which dangled ironically at the side of every wagon.

The cries of the children, the sobs of the women, the curses of the men who walked on foot and picked up any articles which dropped—these alone remained of the life of one of the most flourishing communities of our province. Now our folk wandered about like gipsies, roving aimlessly along the roads. And all because of the greed of one man—a nobleman, a Roumanian, the descendant of an illustrious ancestor! I remembered the words which the generous father of this inhuman son had once spoken at our table: "Against the unjust, cruel, and avaricious man, we must revolt. We must crush him, for evil is not the work of God!"

My resolve was taken. Nevertheless, I went to consult the spiritual head of our benejari, the old priest, to whom I repeated those words of the departed boyar.

After six hours on the road, we reached our first stopping-place, on the heights of Calugareni, which overlook the Danube. Night was falling, heavy and sombre, like our own fate. A torch was lighted in every wagon. We gathered together to comfort ourselves. Even the dogs sought kinder looks than we could give them. One woman was beating hers off. The poor animal retreated a little into the night and stopped, looking back meekly and uncomprehendingly. The priest perceived this scene and was saddened, as was I.

"My daughter, why are you driving him away?"

"Because I have nothing to give him—not even an ear of corn."

"But he is not asking for food. He only wants to follow you. Have you it in your heart to refuse him that consolation?"

At this reproach, the woman began to weep. I took the priest aside and disclosed to him my plan of becoming a *haidouc*.

"I am going to avenge my father, my brothers, my sisters, and the other victims, too. . . ."

"Whom will you punish?"

"Every one! No matter who they are—Roumanian, Greek, or Turk! All who are unjust, cruel, and avaricious!"

The old man did not answer me. He held himself erect in the dark night. His eyes were fixed on the Danube, on his church, on his village, while his long beard undulated in the wind. Slowly he turned his eyes to the wavering lights of the torches fastened to the wagons, and remained as if dreaming. Just then, flames sprang up on the horizon, feeble at first, then rapidly spreading. I touched his shoulder.

"Look, Father! Putineiu and Stanesti are burning!"

He started as if awakened and watched the conflagration, while round about, from every wagon, rose cries of surprise and wrath. Then the priest laid his two hands upon my shoulders, and said to me, in a choked voice:

"Go, my son! Become a haïdouc! And punish the cruel! It is true: Evil is not the work of God!"

When I had seen my family in a safe place, I went away. But during my fifteen years as a haïdouc, under Cosma, I have punished only petty criminals. The great criminals still survive!

And, in God's name! I have no wish to die before I have slaughtered my share of them!

The haïdoucs rose up to a man.

"Hail, Movila! May God help you to slaughter them! And if the Lord will not help you, depend on us!"

*THE NARRATIVE
OF
JEREMY, SON OF THE FOREST*

IN the silence which followed, Floarea Codrilor scrutinized me with an anxious but loving eye.

"Jeremy, son of the forest! Son of Cosma, and my son! Among the *haidoucs*, your birth gives you no superiority, no favour other than that of fighting in the front line. Here you cannot play the part of a *beizade*.³² If, in spite of your youth, I number you among my counsellors, I do so solely by reason of your own qualities and your courage. In the hours of weakness and failure that await us, we shall count much on you and upon the generosity of your blood. We all know who you are. Tell us, then, what you think, and what you believe yourself to be!"

I arose, rather proud of the qualities attributed to me, somewhat discomfited by what was refused me, but on the whole very well satisfied with myself.

It was true that I was not a *beizade*, but I had the heart of one, and the origins of one, as well. Cosma had been a sultan, from his head to his foot. The three things that go to make up a sultan, Cosma possessed: an arrogant carriage, an abundance of women, and a complete lack of conscience. I was of the same breed. So I responded to the invitation.

³² Son of the Sultan. By extension, the son of any vassal prince reigning in the Danube principalities.

YOU think that you know who I am. You know nothing at all.

I was born a haïdouc. I was not made one. The forest was my mother; liberty was the breath of my life. I was a two-year-old baby when Cosma discovered me, in a lonely forest path. I was not crying. I was only astonished. Cosma thrust me into his hunting-bag, and fed me on meat juice and wine. At six, I could swim like a fish. At eleven, I fired my first shot from an arquebus, and got an aching jaw for my enterprise. At twelve, I defied the poteri and was captured.

It was during those two years of terrible confinement that I served my apprenticeship in life. Yes, I learned to know the world as a captive at the court of Samourakis, the archon. And what I thought during that period would not, I imagine, afford you all much delight.

My love of independence, in the first place, extends to the extreme of ingratitude. I must owe nothing to any one, no matter who he may be. . . . Life was given to me without my consent. And if the authors of my being could rejoice over my joys, they could not at all suffer with me in my suffering. When I was wounded, Cosma forsook me and fled. I might well have been killed. He would have continued to live, just the same. He managed well enough, while I was dying at the archon's. My slavery, worse than death, in no way prevented him from feasting and from debauching himself like a tom-cat.

This equally applies to my mother. Fate sent her to the same house that had, for two years, been her son's hell; but while there, she lived in queenly style. Nevertheless, they were my parents, and I was their

son. Why was I *their* son, rather than the son of any other dweller upon the earth? Was it because they wished me to be free, rather than to be a slave? But what human being, worthy of the name, would not rather see his fellow man healthy than sick, whole of limb than maimed? This is, in my opinion, the least virtue that one has the right to expect of men; and that is all one can expect of them. As for the rest, only the man whose head is chopped off, is aware of his own misfortune.

Then, why all this bother about one's parentage? I cannot discover, between parents and sons, such a bond as exists between the body and the head. And all other bonds are deceptive. They do not move me. I do not wish to be deceived, like those orphans who have been given to adoptive parents.

So much, then, for parenthood.

I am similarly ungenerous with respect to the people whom you wish to liberate and to revenge. There, again, my heart is without sympathy. There is no bond between myself and the human horde which bleated at the feet of the archon Samourakis. I am a haïdouc for myself alone, and not for my fellow men. They might quite simply have become haïdoucs, if they had not been born as they were born. Besides, I ask you how one can be a haïdouc for the sake of his neighbour?

One can take away another's strength, but one cannot add to another's strength. And there is a saying that the priest will not ring the angelus thirty-six times to oblige a deaf old woman!

If you prefer not to follow the example of the priest, ring your own angelus for the deaf as long as you please! And if your heart so dictates, why, hire yourself out to work for the man who has just enough

initiative to scratch his head when it itches! *You* may be apostles, if you so desire. *I* have no fancy to be one!

Nevertheless, I shall prove to you that the desire to help the fallen was not always completely lacking in me.

When a year had passed and I perceived that Cosma gave no signs of life and was not lifting a finger to save me from my imprisonment at the archon's, an insane notion began to obsess me—to sow the seeds of revolt among the slaves, incite them to rise up and seize the guard at night, fire the house, and escape with them to the forest.

I believed that these men, like the lowest beasts of burden, preferred freedom to slavery. Cowardly they were indeed, but with a leader to urge them on, I believed that they might be made to march. And I should be their chief!

Ah, what a beautiful dream that was! I pictured the guard overwhelmed, the palace a heap of smoking ruins, and the archon pleading for his life at my feet. I saw the countryside risen at the token of this unexampled exploit, Cosma astonished and humiliated, and I a hero at the age of fourteen.

I knew that my life was at stake. But this life of a court prisoner, immured behind lofty walls, hardly amused me. Day and night, I ruminated on this plan, which became to me as my very existence. Finally I decided, at the end of a feverish week, to confide in two picked and chosen men—two comrades, working like myself in the stables; bold and not too servile fellows. They had been the only persons to pity my plight and greedily drink in my tales of brigandage. I thought that I knew them.

The instant they understood what it was that I proposed, my friends grew pale. Their faces became

drawn. Their frightened eyes avoided mine. The most courageous of the pair ventured:

"We would be taking a terrible risk. We shall be discovered and hanged. You do not know people. Here every one prays for the health of the master who feeds and cares for all. You will not get far with men who daily say: 'Our misfortune is bad, but some other misfortune might be worse.' "

They possessed the mentality of born slaves! My lofty hopes were crumbled! Despairing, I shut myself up in my cabin.

The next day, toward noon, the archon summoned me and, to my great surprise, spoke to me of my plan:

"I am sorry for you, my poor boy, but I cannot help you!"

This lordly indulgence, this superior compassion, only served to rouse my hatred to the point of exasperation for all this human refuse so enslaved.

"Yes, I wanted to chain you and drag you before Cosma," I said, "but that can only be done with the help of free men, and not with slaves!"

His calm infuriated me. I tore two pistols from a panoply and ran to the window, to fire into the pack of brutes assembled in the courtyard.

The archon prevented me, and smilingly said:

"What would you do? Frighten them? You need not fire pistols for that. Look!"

I watched him. He took his gold-embroidered fez, weighted it with a small lump of crystal, and flung it into the midst of the swarm of serfs.

The fall of the fez in the middle of the court had the effect of a bomb.

Every one covered his face with his hands and fled. There were shouts of "Beware, beware! The master is angered!"

"You see," said the archon, still hidden behind the curtains, "it is not even with the aid of slaves that you would have made war against me, but by that of animals. Yes, animals! In my property deeds, it is so written: 'Fifty thousand acres of land, two thousand horned cattle, and four hundred serfs.' It is the same thing. That is why I pitied you but now. He who places himself at the head of a herd of enraged beasts is no chief, but merely a cow tender. Now, you are a haïdouc, and haïdoucs are brave fellows. The devil take them, I bear them no love! But for all that, I cannot help esteeming and fearing them. Would you expect me to fear men who tremble before my very fez? Really, your stupidity annoys me. Had I not the respect for you that is due to every brave man who defies death, I would simply cast you to those vultures and, in an instant, have you torn to pieces. Let a tyrant teach you never to ask slaves to fight for an idea. This constitutes the power wielded by the sultan, the voda, and the archon Samourakis! Now go to your cabin and bravely await your hour. It will come!"

I left, humiliated, and awaited my hour. It came, as you all know; but it came as a result of the action of brave men. Since then I have delivered myself of the dream that links the destiny of free men with the destiny of slaves. We are not all of the same mould. Let him who suffers less under the yoke than at liberty, remain chained. I shall not liberate him. Liberty needs to be defended, and I know not who is to be the more hated and despised: he who suppresses freedom, or he who fears to defend it. I am a haïdouc for the sake of haïdoucs!

"And I am a haïdouc to defend slaves!"

THE HAÏDOUC'S REPLY

THIS unexpected retort, from the ranks of our company, drew everybody's attention to a man standing a little apart. Though he was senior in age to every one present, no one would have guessed it, for his rich mane was still a deep blue-black and contained scarcely a grey hair. His teeth were capable of grinding olive pits. His erect bearing made the very ground tremble. He looked every inch a hero.

Before the astonished faces could turn on him, he declared:

"This I would say to the young man who is so proud of his origins, and who would defend only the liberty of haïdoucs!—

"Poor slaves, I pity their fate! Are they not even to find aid among the defenders of all the oppressed? And to think that, all the while, they worship God and pray for all alike—for the masters who crush them, and for the haïdoucs who despise them! It is true, then, that only the slave's heart has room for generous impulses; that only he knows how to forgive!

"After a whole week of overwhelming labour, the slave can still laugh, sing, and dance on Sundays. After a whole life of unrealized hopes on earth, he can still console himself with the prospect of a better life in heaven. Envy and hate do not embitter him. He is like a dog—a kind word from his master, and he is ready to forget all the beatings. He forgets that the fields belong to the master and the forests to the haïdoucs, and

that it is he, after all, who furnishes them both with their fill of bread and meat.

"Truly, it is difficult to say whether what the peasant most needs is better masters, or haïdoucs capable of forgiveness!

"Here is a young son of the forest, who might just as well have been born in a castle. The codrou,³³ which struggles night and day against storms, ivy, and decay—the codrou, the Roumanian's brother, has taught him nothing, neither by its battles nor by its brotherliness, and still less by its generosity! Why, then, should he be proud of this noble birth? Why should he take pride in a slave mother, who offers to all, without distinction—to the persecuted as well as to the malefactor—shade and warmth, nourishment and safe shelter, if he should then despise her and abandon her to vandals? For the forest is the mighty slave, who lives only to create happiness for an ungrateful world. In return for her manifold offerings, she receives only ingratitude, from the child who breaks a seedling and from the beast who browses upon her buds, to the very birds who cover her with droppings and the sky which smites at her with its flail of lightning. And nevertheless, like that human herd which Jeremy despises, she never ceases to worship that God who is more generous to lice than to the most magnificent of His creations.

"Thus it goes. While the bramble arms itself with innumerable thorns in order to defend its useless and miserable existence, the forest, obedient to her mission on earth, fulfills her destiny; and even as the ax is striking at her roots, her tree-tops are singing their last hymn to the sun.

³³ Thick forest.

"Jeremy! The haïdouc who is now speaking to you is the bastard of a slave girl and of a nobleman's son. You know that, in this respect, the nobility are like us—they breed everywhere!

"Well, none the less, I refused to serve the nobility. I fled to the forest when I was ten years old, and here I have lived for fifty years. I have fought under the haïdouc Jianu. I have served the great pandour, Tudor Vladimiresco, and finally I made one of the band of your father, Cosma. All three were tyrants, and I was their slave. It is true that their tyranny was noble, but my slavery was none the less difficult. Whether one is hanged by Tudor or by the archon Samourakis, one is hanged, however you may view it. I have always submitted, and I have frequently endured terrible injustices. I did so for the sake of an 'idea.' And then, again, I did so because I was—well, afraid! I would say to myself: 'My misfortunes are bad enough, but they might easily be worse.' You must not forget that my mother was a slave, and that all slaves are cowards. But how could you expect them to be courageous? For centuries they have had fear in their blood: for centuries they have been whipped and hanged—sometimes by Tudors, and at other times by archons.

"You must understand, my brave young fellow, that, whether it be in the fields or in the forests, there are always masters who rule!"

The night, heavy with fog, was falling softly over the Dark Valley. One could no longer distinguish the faces of the haïdoucs in Bear Cave.

TOWARD SNAGOV

I

Haidouc Song

THAT year the spring, although early and mild, was quite rainy. So it was possible for our band to leave its winter retreat a little earlier than is customary for the haidoucs; but for the time being, we could not think of reaching the plain, as the roads were broken and impassable, and no wagoner would venture over them. It was in the disguise of wagoners that our captain, Floarea Codrilor, had planned to move us about over the entire territory. She rightly informed us that the poteri were seeking us on the mountain paths, rather than in the towns or in the open country. It was intended that we should abandon our all too familiar mode of living, which had formerly confined the haidoucs (in isolated bands) to the edges of struggling peasant communities. We must now win over to us this peasant, brutalized by four centuries of exploitation, and make him understand that the haidoucs would be helpless to deliver him from the yoke as long as he grovelled in animal submission. That is why the rebels proposed to change themselves into sturdy wagoners, and to become part of the interminable lines of wagon traffic which pass through the length and breadth of the principalities of the Danube. Transporting real and false merchandise, they were to drink, laugh, and gossip with their comrades; to permit themselves, if necessary, to be flogged like them, but ever to be ready to

succour and awaken from his tragic sleep the peasant, that "talking beast which surpasses the ox in endurance and the rabbit in fecundity." And if it was well understood that, while pursuing this attempt at relief, we should not entirely abstain from pillaging and chastising, now and then, certain conspicuous offenders, we were none the less to consider these as acts as of secondary importance, serving to keep the people on the alert and to give vent to the vengeful passions of certain primitive and limited haïdoucs.

Such was the plan which this noble-hearted and clear sighted woman had slowly elaborated and patiently matured, during the long winter which preceded the spring of 1854.

She did even better than that. Through the agency of certain confederates, whom she dispatched to all parts of the country, she communicated her plans to several chiefs of the haïdoucs—among whom was Groza, her childhood friend—and appointed a rendezvous with them for the early part of May, in the low mountains of Tazlau, in Moldavia.

It was the first time that such an idea had been conceived in the brain of a haïdouc. Ordinarily, each chief and his own company carried on their isolated operations in the region familiar to them, flashing for a time like meteors, only to be promptly extinguished, either on the gibbet or in battle with the poteri.

Now a woman—"the loveliest woman of the Roumanian land," as Cosma had exclaimed—was exhorting them to unite.

"Come, my friends, to the summits of the Faucon, near the Tazlau spring," she said to them, in her letter. "It is not I who summon you; it is our suffering country. You are patriots. I am a patriot. You have brave

followers, who obey you as free men. I, too, have such followers. But what are you doing with all these generous spirits? Nothing, unless it is to incite them to murder. Murder! Has homicide alone ever moved by an inch the plough of the slave? Have you ever seen a man more intelligent, more courageous and worthy, for having severed the head of another man? We are heroes, but we behave as assassins, and we die a worse death than the dogs. Enough! Let us wage no more personal quarrels. You will forget them beneath the smile of my dark eyes and my white teeth. I will be your sister, passionate as a mistress. And we will undertake that which is more difficult than a punitive attack, but which will more effectively arouse our vanquished brethren. Floarea Codrilor, captain of *haidoucs*, will await you without fail, in the first week of the month of flowers!"

All had enthusiastically responded to this invitation. And now we were on our way to the appointed meeting-place.

Fourteen men, four counsellors, and Floarea composed the equestrian troop that descended toward the valley of the Basca. A feeble force to set out upon a *haidouc* expedition! They gazed at one another with melancholy tenderness. The same thought could be read in every eye: Which among us will not survive to see the coming spring?

It is not often that the *haidouc* thinks of the supreme danger, but springtime recalls it to him. The wind then is young, freshly washed by the snows, and as bold as youth itself. It sported with the venerable beard of Ely, combing it stubbornly away; it smothered Floarea, as she rode pensively at the head of the company, with caresses, to which she abandoned herself voluptuously, for the wind was her first love. At times

its violence was such as almost to whip our pointed bonnets off our heads. The long tresses of our captain then floated like an oriflamme. As we traversed the forests, the feet of our animals unmercifully crushed the pretty, tender snowdrops—those little bells of sugar which hang from the neck of spring, the eternally new-born.

Thus we left behind us the bristling summits of the Carpathians and came, one sunny day, to the high plateaux of Penteleu, which contain the largest cheese dairies of Roumania.

Shepherds were already there, with their thousands of ewes and lambs. The tinkling of bells, the sound of flutes, snatches of song, and cries filled the air and lent to the place such an animation as we had not known in almost six months.

Floarea Codrilor stopped, and said to us:

"These are happy human beings. The Turkish yataghan and the national whip dare not venture to these parts. Alas, that our whole nation cannot take to the mountains and dwell there!"

At this moment we perceived, quite close to us, a young shepherd busy planting two crudely fashioned wooden crosses. At his feet were the old, rotted crosses, which he had pulled up to make place for the new. The youth, who had flung his heavy cloak of fur on the ground, was applying himself to his task with a touching earnestness, and gave no heed to our presence.

Our captain questioned him. He answered, somewhat gruffly:

"These are the graves of Gheorghitza, the haidouc, and his mistress. Both of them were killed here by the poteri."

"My God!" Floarea cried, removing her little astrakhan bonnet. And then, kneeling:

"I heard of these brave people in my childhood."

"She died before him. He was killed defending her."

"And who commissioned you to change their crosses?" one of our men inquired.

"Nobody. We do it of our own accord. Who do you think would commission us? The poteri?"

Then, picking up his cloak, stick, and flute, he added, with a touch of evil presage:

"Perhaps we shall do the same for you, some day."

"For us?" Floarea exclaimed. "Then you know who we are?"

"Certainly!"

"Who are we?"

"Haïdoucs, of course! Is not that enough?"

And turning toward his flock, he seated himself on a boulder and intoned, vigorously, but as if for himself alone, the long ballad of Gheorghitza,³⁴ the haïdouc, whose grave he had just renewed.

"Little leaf of Indian carnation! Who is this, who climbs to the Istritza? Why, it is Gheorghitza, the cap-

³⁴ This haïdouc is perhaps the most authentic of all, for he is the only one who historically has a tomb—which was exhibited, around 1885, by all the shepherds of the region—as well as a biographical notice, quite detailed, and more exact than the ballads concerning him. This notice was communicated to the historian by the director of the secondary school at Buzeu, the seat of the province where the haïdouc lived and perished. The two variants of this ballad run, when counted together, to seven hundred lines. Unfortunately, it deals only with the haïdouc himself, popular inspiration having entirely neglected the valiant mistress of the hero, as authentic as himself. The text follows that of the collection of M. G. Dem. Theodorescu: *Poesii Populare Romane*, 1885. (Gheorghitza, Gheorghiache, and Gheorgelash, the names encountered in the ballad, are diminutives of Gheorghe, or George.)

tain, the lad of Negoitza, Negoitza of Cislau, the great-grandson of the mayor.

“Green leaf of sweet-heather! On the mountain, over the rough paths, Gheorghiasche wanders from sheepfold to sheepfold. Everywhere he tastes the cream and cheese, but the instant he put a morsel to his mouth, that instant he spits it on the ground, saying that it is salty and bad. Then, see him rummaging among the pelts. . . . He is looking for a little piece of fur, with which to make himself a bonnet—a mountaineer’s bonnet, so that nobody will recognize him. Then, after Wednesday, Thursday came, and the brave fellow went ever climbing, until he had reached the Istritza. Up there, he went straight to the spring of the fir, to the pasture ground of Raoul, Raoul the mountaineer, whom he knew; and thus he spake to him:

“ ‘Green leaf of eglantine! Hey, grey-bearded Father Raoul, you who have the sheepfold far up in the forest and your hut of three beams builded on a root, ah, you know not what are my misfortunes! Know you Macovei, son of Father Matei, who dwells on the point of Ursei?’

“ ‘Certainly, I know him. In good truth I know him, for I kept his flock in my youth.’

“ ‘And I, since childhood, have served him, faithfully and honestly. During that time I acquired a little property, but he coveted it, and though I was quite young, made me marry one of his nieces. Ah, the villain! He took all my property, robbed me of my wife, and persuaded her to fly with his son. But this was not enough: he robbed me of all my money, leaving me so poor that I was forced to run away and become a haïdouc. But even then he pursued me with the poteri, seized and bound me, and at the passage of the Cislau,

when I bent down to drink some water, he gave me such a kick in the neck that I drank water mixed with blood and my own teeth. Now I know that he is hiding in these parts. Tell me, Father Raoul, have not you seen him? Has not he spoken of me, nor asked shelter?’

“*Deh*, Captain Gheorghitza, it is true that I saw him two or three days ago, but he asked not shelter of me, nor questioned me about you.’

“‘Ah, the hateful enemy! For seven years I have lived in exile on Basca-Without-Egress. If I lay my hands on him, he will be counted no more among the living. But tell me something, brother. Have you nothing in your fold to sell? And should you not like to take me up there and show it to me?’

“‘*Deh*, Captain Gheorghiache, I won’t say no. But you know that, although you are a young and likable man, you have a bad reputation, for you continually wander through the folds; everywhere you do nothing but sample cream and cheese, and spit them out instantly, saying that they are salty and bad. Then you rummage through the pelts, but it is not a little piece of fur for your bonnet that you seek; that is pretence—you wish to discover where Macovei is hidden!’

“‘Yes, Father Raoul, it is as you say, but it is not my fault. My heart is not rancorous, and if I hate Macovei, it is only because he has done me much mischief.’

“‘Green tulip leaf! They said what they said; then Father Raoul went to show Gheorghitza the sheepfold. They did not climb far; and once on top, Gheorghiache quickly went all over the farm. . . . He rummaged everywhere. Nothing escaped his eyes.

“‘Grey-bearded Father Raoul! Are you conceal-

ing no one in your fold? I do not wish to quarrel with you!

“ ‘Oh, you must not quarrel with me! This is how it was. You see, yesterday evening, toward night, my shepherd drank too much fresh milk and fell sick of fever. Now he lies among the leathern cheese-bags, among the furs. Do not mistake him for God knows whom, and raise trouble with me!’

“So saying, he showed Gheorghitza his flock of sheep. Gheorghitza took a pair of shears and tried his hand at shearing, but he cropped nothing. The wool did not please him; he had no need of it. His dark eyes roved continually and at length they discovered Macovei; ah, they perceived Macovei! With difficulty, Gheorghitza restrained an oath, but he bided his time and asked Father Raoul to show him some furs. They were not very good. Gheorghelash took them in his hands, threw them aside, turned them all round; and then, at what he thought was the right moment, he leaped on Macovei with one bound, grasped him by the hair, and thus judged him:

“ ‘Green linden leaf! Be you accursed, Macovei! Who made you come out where I could see you? Is it your life that shortens? Is it my sins that increase? For seven years I served you. . . . I was the drudge of your children. Then you made me marry your niece, the better to rob me. And that shame that you put upon me at my wedding, making me dance, dead drunk, with a hot coal in my shoe! And that day when you knocked my mouth against a stone, breaking my teeth! Do you recall your crimes, that have made me sleep on straw?’

“Macovei moaned; Macovei implored:

“ ‘Gheorghitza, Gheorghelash! Valiant, young,

and courteous. Take my horse and arms, but leave me my life—leave me to prolong my days. I have children to nourish and marry off—nieces who shall implore you for pardon for my sins!’

“‘I will take them all, and your life, too, so that your children and your nieces may recall your sins!’

“Then Father Raoul, perceiving that this pleasantry had become threatening, intervened and said:

“‘Say, Gheorghitza, Gheorghiache! Youthful of countenance, and full of courtesy! Be you not so filled with hate! The devil! Is that why you came to the fold? Come, leave him his days, for he will give you his whole fortune, which he has buried here, behind the door.’

“At these words, Gheorghitza was beside himself, and cried out to Raoul:

“‘Ah, old greybeard! Sluggard, babbler, liar! So that is the reason for your sneaking! And you found that I had a bad reputation, the while you were harbouring thieves?’

“And drawing his sword, he quartered Macovei; then he went back to his companions, had the fires lighted, and led out his horse. But he had evil forebodings.

“Green burdock leaf! There is Captain Stephen. He is the god-brother of Gheorghitza, for he once held one of his children at the font and received a fine ring from the haïdouc, but now he is captain of the poteri—may the Holy Virgin curse him! He enters the forest and approaches the glade where Gheorghitza and his companions have halted. Below, Stephen spoke thus to his poteri (the poteri of Buzeu, may the Lord destroy them!):

" 'Rest a little, children, so that we may send a volley into Gheorghitza, for he is quite dangerous, and capable of killing us all!'

"Then, lifting his rifle that was filled with silver bullets, he aimed at the haïdouc and hit him in the seat of his soul, somewhat below the navel, where it hurts brave men to be shot.

"Gheorghelash placed a hand over his wound, drew forth a ring, and thus spoke:

" 'On the faith that you lack, Stephen, my traitorous god-brother, I gave you this ring, and with it you now strike me. But unless I die suddenly, I will bite into your flesh!'

"And he took his musket, leaned against a rock, and aimed at Stephen. But death came, and in this posture it transfixed him!

"For three days he remained there, and no one dared approach him. Everybody was afraid. Then Beshg Ely arrived, severed his head, emptied it of its brain, and carried it away to Bucharest. Every one whom he encountered upon the road, all who beheld the head of Gheorghelash, burst into tears, so beautiful he was!"

We had listened to the shepherd religiously, as if in a church. His ballad finished, he was off behind his flock, no longer noticing us. This displeased us: we should have liked to see him a little more aware of the interest which we had taken in his narrative, for, all in all, it was our own history that he was relating.

Floarea Codrilor seemed much affected. Long she gazed, with troubled eyes, at the two newly-planted

crosses. Then, moving toward her horse, she sighed from the depth of her bosom, and said:

"In this world, everything ends in a haïdouc balad!"

The Dying Man of Bissoca

IN order to reach Moldavia, we had only to cross one province, that of Ramnicou-Sarat. Prudence counselled us not to lose sight of the chain of mountains and its fraternal woods, a sure refuge in case of danger, for Floarea was resolute in her decision to undertake nothing, and to risk nothing, until she had come to an agreement with the haïdouc chiefs at that interview at Taz-lau, where she hoped to give the united haïdoucs a quite different plan of warfare. Besides, we were not numerous: we were hardly a score, in all. We needed at least as many more "mounted rifles" for successful attack and defence.

But man is not master of his actions. A chance occurrence, quite unforeseen, occasioned, at the very outset, an exploit which was to render famous the woman whom we had chosen as our captain.

On the evening of the first marching-day, after leaving the pasture lands of Penteleu, we halted north of the village of Bissoca, in a mountainous and heavily wooded region, where we were to pass a part of the night. Our troop encamped, not without first having made sure that all would be quiet. A tiny farm house in ruins, which we thought abandoned, served as our shelter. Our animals were soon stabled, each with his nose in a bag of oats. A good fire, which we lit in the middle of the yard, helped to warm our frozen bones. Movila, our cook, broiled very rapidly two suckling

lambs. With a good piece of cheese and a pot of wine to top it, each was able to appease his hunger.

This we did in less than an hour; the four of our companions who were doing sentry duty came in their turn to refresh themselves, then we relieved each other in fours every half-hour throughout the night.

The night was damp, rather than cold. We spoke little. Some were polishing their arms, while others slept, presenting now a breast, now a back to the fire. Sometimes the flames from the dry branches lit up the entire yard and the gaping roofs of the doorless, windowless ruins. Then one could see all the details of this deserted place.

Floarea, who was constantly scrutinizing a dark corner of the yard, said to us:

"I believe that a human being lives here, or at least comes here by day. Look at that kennel in the corner of the wall. It is freshly covered; its door is in good condition, and there is an ax lying on the ground to one side."

We glanced at the place she had indicated, but no one bothered to go and examine it closely. It was too comfortable beside the fire. And, moreover, what was there to fear from the wretch who occupied the kennel? Floarea herself paid no further attention to it, but wrapped herself in her blanket and turned her back to the fire; but soon afterwards, she declared that she had heard a feeble moan.

I rose, and advanced several steps into the darkness.

"Our captain is right. There is a light now in the cabin. I can see it through the cracks in the door."

Everyone rushed up. Floarea cautiously opened the door, and then we saw an old man, bearded and lean,

stretched out on a plank bed, face upward, his hands joined on his breast and holding a lighted taper. Higher on his breast, almost up to his chin, stood a tiny ikon representing the Virgin. The man was resting uneasily, fully dressed, with his head on a sack stuffed with straw. Near the bed stood a pitcher. In a corner was a hamper filled with old clothing. On the hearth, the ashes of a long extinguished fire.

At our appearance, the old man turned toward us his sunken eyes and manifested some astonishment:

"I did not hear you come," he said, in a sufficiently clear voice. "I am deaf."

"If you were only deaf, that would be nothing," Floarea cried, "but you are also in great misfortune. What is it? Who are you?"

Without moving, he replied:

"It is useless to speak to me. I am as deaf as a tomb."

Interested and powerless, our friend made him understand by signs that we wished to help him, or at least give him something to eat.

"Too late! I need nothing. Now I wait for death, lovely domnitza!"⁸⁵

Floarea asked us to light a fire in the hearth, and to prepare a bowl of hot, sugared wine. The man stubbornly refused to taste the drink, and said that the fire was unnecessary.

"I feel nothing. I am dying. You see how it is! I am holding my own dead-light. I do not want to yield up my soul like a dog. And perhaps death would have already come, if I had not been kept alive by the fear

⁸⁵ Daughter of the reigning prince, or his wife, while she is quite young.

of setting my clothes on fire. For three days, I have done nothing but light and extinguish the taper. . . . I have lain on this bed a full week, neither eating nor drinking. It is over! I am dying!"

He put out his taper and rested it on his breast.

"All that you can do for me, since the Lord has sent you here, is to watch for the end and then light the taper. Thus I shall be relieved of the fear of burning myself alive, and I can compose myself to die this very night. Do this for my poor soul; then bury me, and may the Lord protect you on your way. You are haïdoucs—I recognize it by your arms, and by your humanity."

Despite his wretched aspect, the dying man did not lack a certain distinction. His features were perhaps ennobled by his valiantly endured suffering. His speech was dignified, and he expressed himself with ease. Yet he was obviously a peasant, or a former small landowner. But whence came his extreme distress? What frightful story did this expiring life conceal?

Our captain made strenuous efforts to have him understand her desire to hear it. Seated on the hamper near the bed, Floarea warmed his hands and urged him with signs. He understood.

"Well, lovely domnitza. One does not begin to tell the story of one's life when one is on the point of death. It is a long tale. And my breath is scant. My life and my misfortunes are those of an entire nation. Haïdoucs, you ought to know them as well as myself!"

The old man paused. He seemed to reflect. His eyes were fixed on the flames of the hearth, which danced over his lean and hirsute face. Then he turned his head toward us, who clustered in the frame of the

door, deeply moved by curiosity to know who he might be, who was dying thus, abandoned, and forced to carry his own death taper.

Floarea exhorted him, by signs, to proceed. Then he told us the following tale:

"Since I know now that you will help me to die like a Christian and will bury me, I shall try to narrate as much of my life history as death will permit.

"I have not always been the wretch I am now. Like most of those who inhabited the olden days, I come of a family of warriors, who defended the soil of the nation under our good princes of former times. I come of razechi ³⁶ parents. At that time the country had only the Prince, who was vigilant and valiant, his council of boyars, almost all of them honest men, and us razechi, and here and there some good-for-nothing fellows in every community, who could be counted on one's fingers. My ancestors possessed farm land, woods, and pastures—more than they needed.

"But the times that followed have changed the face of the world. The good princes have disappeared. The boyars have multiplied like bad weeds, have become unjust, rapacious, and each one desirous of ruling, be it only for a few months. The throne being, as it is today, in the hands of the Turks, and the power for sale to the highest bidder, the new boyars needed money to gain powerful partisans in the country and, at Stamboul, to buy over the favourites of the Sultan. From this resulted theft and pillage. They had no need of the razechi, but of much land, and of serfs to work it.

"The method was simple: from time to time their servants would move the boundary stones of our pro-

³⁶ Farmers, small landowners.

perties. The domains of the boyar spread like the itch. The deeds were always lost. We could prove nothing. Before our very eyes, we could see our rights on God's land diminish. Complain? To whom? Those who were robbing us were at the same time judges of the Divan. They bought many false witnesses: a sub-prefect, a priest, or two or three drunkards. Our own witnesses never received any consideration.

"To this high-handed procedure were added two scourges which finally completed our ruin: taxes on everything that moved and that did not move, and the flagellation of those who could not pay. In less than two generations we forgot our past. The worthy man of yore became a frightened animal, who doffed his bonnet in the presence of any old scarecrow who came shouting at the threshold of his hut. The most diligent working man was now no more than a do-nothing; the best-behaved, a drunkard. Thus the country became divided into serfs and boyars, and certain of those boyars today own as much as twenty domains, ranging from ten to one hundred thousand hectares of land.

"Alas! This misfortune brought on a still more frightful one. The Turks and Greeks of Stamboul, learning that the Roumanian boyars were treating their own country as if it were a conquered land, rushed upon us like an army of grasshoppers. All they wanted was to get into some agreement with those who for so long had despoiled us, and to suck our blood in good company. Our boyars yielded to them without too much difficulty, for, above all, it was a question of saving their own skins.

"Many of our landed gentry, at the price of our poor hides, entered into the good graces of the Sublime Porte by leasing one or more domains to influential

Greeks, and by accepting Greeks as their sons-in-law. These leasings made us curse the day when our mothers brought us into the world. We descended to the level of the gipsy slaves. Still lower, even, for the slaves were at least fed, while we were perishing of hunger.

"The Turks and Greeks vied frantically with each other in despoiling our daughters and wives.

"Ah, pitiless God! Woe to the poor creature, married or not, who found herself beautiful and pleasing to the invader! Woe also to the poor little boys who crossed the path of the Turk. Dishonour, torture, and death awaited them, often under the very eyes of their parents, who were themselves often massacred.

"And here is my own story:

"About 1821, when Ypsilanti and his hetairia called upon the Greeks to fight against the Turks, I was still a man in comfortable circumstances. I lived in a province bordering upon the Danube, with my wife and our two children—a girl of twenty and a boy of twelve. Another boy, the oldest, had married and was living in an adjacent village.

"At that time, we could still thank God. Though straitened in our circumstances and reduced to strict economies, we had no loss to deplore among our family, nor had we experienced bodily violence. But now the Greeks declared war against our common enemy, the Turks, as they said. We had occasion to rejoice. They were Christians, like ourselves, and their cause was just. A weakening of the Ottoman power could only result to our advantage.

"Ah, words! The magic of words, food of the poor and the instrument of tyrants!

"Greek hordes, men without faith or country, confounded revolution with pillage, mistook the Rouma-

nian lands for a Turkish vilayet, and before perceiving the kandjar of their master, had sufficient enthusiasm to rush upon our women and our possessions.

"It was in vain that Ypsilanti, the single honest man among them, the single true patriot of all the hetairia, proclaimed the sacredness of our land and made severe examples among the guilty.

"And how could it be otherwise, when the brave national pandours of our Tudor Vladimirescu, our Roumanian Ypsilanti, could not themselves, in spite of a few hangings, resist the pleasure of violating our daughters and abusing those who fell into their hands? And if the miscarriage of the hetairia in the Danubian principalities cost the Greek general only a great disappointment, which he vented publicly upon the heads of his scamps, the resentment of poor Tudor, sold by his own men, cost him his head.

"I am content to die—to have nothing more to do with this world! Horrible herd, that flogs or permits itself to be flogged, but knows no middle ground between these two ignominies! Now I know that if the masters of the world are without humanity, the world itself is no whit better than its masters. A pity for the just of this earth! We got off rather well than otherwise at the hands of the bands of the hetairia. Our community did not suffer overmuch; there were several rapes and some pillage, but no murders. I defended my hearth as the she-wolf defends her young. My son, too, got off with only some material loss. And we considered the peril as averted when, one fine day, the settlements were warned that the Turkish soldiers were occupying the country, with the purpose of pursuing the Greeks and suppressing the hetairia.

"That occupation! Although we had nothing to

do with the revolt of the Greeks, and despite the assurances of the padischah who 'guaranteed the life and property of his faithful raïas,' we paid dearly for the brawl.

"For the first time, the peasants among us had occasion to learn that the world is divided between the strong and the weak, that the strong do not devour one another, and that the weak are without a country.

"As soon as the Turkish army landed in our territory, the most patriotic concern of the boyars was to secure their own property against the expected ravages of the Mussulman soldiers. The famous otousbirs were known for their ferocity. For a heavy purse of gold, every lord obtained from the Turkish commandant a hostage, who was generally an aga. This aga, nourished, housed, and fatly paid, had the responsibility of defending the court of the boyar who had taken him as hostage against the depredations of the otousbirs.

"It meant peace for our masters, but with how much human misery this peace of theirs was to be saturated, only the complaints of our children could tell!

"For all the ruin, all the bereavement of that sinister epoch, nothing equals the suffering which the flesh of our little children had to endure.

"I will not speak of the ransoms in money and kind which the maintenance of the Turkish army cost the peasant. Many were left without a rag to cover them, and had to flee, maimed by the topouz, into the mountains, after losing family and home. I was of that number; but the loss of my possessions did not cause me to shed a tear; one's property can be recovered, while the creatures who constitute the joy of one's life remain for ever lost. And it was these that the storm swept away from me, even to the last.

"Lord God, Thou art omnipotent, but Thou hast no heart! Where is Thy boasted magnanimity?

"Listen, haïdoucs, to what took place in one week in the life of a man, and then tell me if beasts can surpass human beings in ferocity.

"One Saturday evening, the aga of our boyar, accompanied by two otousbirs, rushed into my yard. Those terrible bachi-bazoucks terrified my wife and children. I awaited them and, seizing an ax, cried to them in Turkish that I would strike down the first one to enter my house. Hardly had I uttered this threat, when a blow in the chest from the flat of a kandjar knocked me to the ground. I lost consciousness.

"When I came to myself, my mouth full of blood, I saw my wife lying strangled in a corner of the room. Between the fingers of one hand she clutched a mass of hair torn from a moustache. My daughter and little boy were not there. Again I lost consciousness; then, waking late in the night, I felt my body bathed with cold sweat and understood by that grief that tortured my breast that all I had mistaken for a nightmare was true. Thus the night passed.

"The morning of the following day, a Sunday, the church bells tolled the knell of a people massacred. A neighbour appeared and gave me some brandy to drink. He came from my son, who dwelt with his wife in a nearby village, and who offered to conceal me in his loft. I could not move a finger, much less rise and walk the two kilometres to his house.

"The peasant left, and presently returned with women to take charge of my dead wife. Another villager came the next day, and related how the otousbirs had sacked the church, driven their horses into it, broken the ikons, and removed the precious objects,

which they were selling along the roads. Leaves of torn holy books and old documents were found scattered everywhere. Our good priest, whom the Turks thought was rich, was tortured until he had given up the ghost.

" 'It is the end of the world,' added the peasant. 'The village is almost deserted. Only the boyar suffers not at all: his aga defends him, and costs him only money. But it is that hostage that costs us our lives!'

"I rose painfully and dragged myself to the court of our master, who was called 'one of the seven pillars of the country.' The noble pillar refused to listen to me. His steward called the aga and timidly ventured to reproach him for the crime which he had perpetrated upon my family. He implored him to restore my two children.

" 'What!' cried the so-called hostage, 'not take any more girls and boys? Impossible! Crazy!'

"The steward, who was not without a heart, assured me that he would do his utmost to contrive the escape of my daughter, whom the aga had locked up in the very court of the boyar. As for the boy, he was still in the hands of the otousbirs.

"I went home, where my wife lay on two tables, the dead-lights at her head and feet, and mourning women all about her. My eldest son alone took care of the interment. I could not stand upon my legs. My heart was black, and I choked continually and thought that I was dying. So my son decided to remain that night with me. He wept the whole night.

"At noon, the next day, I was alone when a man rushed into the yard, crying:

" 'Vassil, Vassil! Hurry to the church square! The otousbirs are going to Turk your boy!'

"I rushed out, as if I had never had a pain. In

front of the church, in the midst of a crowd, my boy was trussed up on a chair. He had a stupefied look, and his face was covered with blue marks. A Turk was swathing his head with a long peasant towel, and crying out:

"Henceforth this child is Turkish! Whoever touches him will be put to death!"

"Almost fainting, I lifted my arms and shouted:

"Pagans! That child is mine!"

"That same instant, I saw my big son rush up, his head bare, his eyes staring wild, a double-barrelled pistol in each hand. He fired four times on the otousbirs, and brought down three.

"That was all I could see, for the blood rushed out of my mouth and nose, and I fell unconscious to the ground.

"For two days I wavered between life and death, knowing nothing of what was passing in my house. Some people had carried me there.

"Far better it had been, had my eyes remained for ever closed, for in the house my two sons, massacred instantly after my fall, were awaiting the moment when they would be taken to join their mother.

"That was on Thursday of the week of my passion. On Friday, it was my daughter's turn to be sent to follow the other three. She went not alone. Having escaped from the aga's, she had sought refuge with her sister-in-law, the widow of my son. They were strangled together.

"Are not the shoulders of one man too feeble to support all this, in one week?"

"Well, you will see that twenty-seven years afterward—that is, six years ago—another disaster fell upon these old shoulders.

"There was left to me a daughter of sixteen, who lived here, at Bissoca, in this farmhouse which you see in ruins and which belonged to my eldest brother. Poor Mihai, though affectionate and better off than myself, had never wished to marry. He rightly said that the more attached one grows to beloved creatures, the more wretched one is left on losing them. It was the loss of a dog that had made him feel thus.

"Yet he could not resist the love he had for my daughter Mariouca—an affection which was shared by the child—and he asked me to let him take her under his care:

" 'I will have her marry a fine lad, and leave her all my fortune.'

"I gave her to him. She was then only twelve. Since then I had never seen them, for times had grown hard for me, and Bissoca was a week's journey by carriage from the country where I lived.

"But then, my family gone, my property reduced to practically nothing, I yoked my two horses, abandoned the scene of my misfortunes, and went to throw myself into their arms.

"For me, it was now but a life of lamentation—lamentation lasting ten whole years. My eyes were so wasted that I could not close them. Among the peasants of Bissoca, I was called 'the spectre of the beech wood.'

"My daughter, young and full of life, spoiled by her uncle and eager for happiness, gave the beloved dead her tribute of tears and quickly forgot them for the surge of youth within her. It would have been a crime to reproach her. The good Mihai, on the other hand, distressed by my disaster and confirmed in the correctness of his opinion of life, took upon himself the half of my grief, lacerated his soul with the relent-

less zeal of a man born to suffer with all that suffering is, and died like a saint, two years after my arrival at Bissoca.

"I remained alone, with my tears, my forests, and my flock. I forgot my daughter, who, deprived of tenderness, appropriated her uncle's ideas about the dangers of affection, and practised them perversely. She too refused to make a home for herself, but it was because she had not a mother's heart and wished to indulge, unchecked, the madness of her passions. Thus, while I hunted the wild beasts in the wood, she sought love in the clacas.

"The unfortunate girl was heavily punished, for, toward her twenty-fifth year, she gave birth to a child whose entrance into the world cost her life.

"Her death did not greatly affect me. I had grown accustomed to living apart from her. I considered her as a stranger in our family. To compensate myself, I became infatuated with her baby, a lovely little girl, who filled my life with joy and tenderness.

"No more tears. No more despair. A gentle trust had come to lend meaning to my old age. All my dead ones came to life again; all their tenderness shone in the dark eyes of my little Angelina. I lavished on her attentions that would have made a prince's child envious, and she inspired me with raptures of infatuation which caused the peasants to think that I had lost my reason. Heedless of my sixty years, I climbed to the tops of trees, where I would imitate for her the song of the cuckoo. I clad myself in the fur of a bear I had killed, and danced before the six-year-old Angelina, who drummed my back with her tiny hands and sang as the *tzigane* sings to his dancing bear:

“Dance well, my fine Marine,
And you shall have bread and olives!

“Ah, God, what antics, from morning till night, to make her laugh! Her voice had the quality of the high notes of the accordion. Even fatigue was a delight when, in winter, with Angelina on my back and the sled under my arms, I would bound a hundred times up the hill covered with snow in which I wallowed belly-deep, completely out of breath—and what grandfather was happier than I as we coasted down the hill, I with my darling on my knees?

“Absorbed in Angelina, I lived the fairest years of my life. Only my advanced age, when she was nearing her fifteenth year, made me anxious for her future, when I should be gone. She was beautiful, like all fruit of a forbidden love. You might have thought her one of those famous gamins born of a beautiful *tzigane* and a handsome lord of the land, both seized with madness for one whole night of summer. Her character was like ours. It did not resemble her mother's. She loved me, teased me, and was well-behaved and domestic. Her walks did not extend far, and she never went out alone; whether on foot, on horseback, or in the carriage, we were inseparable. And since her beauty was exceeded only by her mercy, she soon became the angel of all those whom winter surprised short of wood, flour, and a provision of cheese.

“How, cruel God! in the midst of this great happiness, could I have thought of an enemy who, from afar, had his eyes fixed upon my Angelina, my whole reason for existing? And why was it not permitted me to forget my ancient misfortunes, to enjoy what I considered as a divine recompense, and to fear no more

the ferocity of man? Had I not sufficiently laved it in the blood of my dear ones?

"And yet, could I have roused myself for an instant from my senile infatuation, I could easily have recognized this enemy, for I had often looked into his eyes and heard his voice.

"He was the superior of the Orbou monastery, a bandit Koutzo-Vlaque, from that Macedonia, certain of whose inhabitants change their nationality more often than their shirts, and who are not Roumanians, nor Greeks, nor Bulgarians, nor men. He was known as a great intriguer, powerfully protected, but no more than vague rumours circulated regarding his lustful conduct. His monastery is one of those which have stolen the most land and wooded hillsides from the poor peasant communities of the olden days. Gipsy slaves throng its domains.

"The Staretz of Orbou sometimes deigned to honour with his presence our Sabbath vespers. There I came regularly with Angelina. He saw the dove and gazed upon her with a look of flame. Then his visits became more frequent, until, one Sunday, he came up to us, spoke to me, offered the back of his right hand to our lips, and then, joining his hands on the golden head of the young girl, gave her a warm benediction.

" 'May the celestial pronia, lovely Angelina, have you under its protection, and lead your steps to the path of happiness. Amen.'

"The peasants who witnessed this mark of attention envied us. They ceased to envy us a week later, when, going out for a ramble in the woods, we were set upon by an armed band which, in the twinkling of an eye, carried off my darling and left me stunned on the ground. . . . A rain of cudgel blows upon my

head made me lose all notion of this world, and feel as if it had disappeared at the same time as myself.

"I did not die, for I must have seven souls, like a cat; but it is from that time that my ears have been useless and indifferent to all sounds.

"That was six years ago.

"The Orbou monastery, that nest of earthly joy and heavenly mockery, still shelters within its walls the monster who is called its 'Superior'!

"My Angelina is no more!

"Three months after the abduction I left my bed, a deaf and failing old man, and took the road for Bucharest, to complain to the Divan of the country. The Divan, slightly surfeited with these monastic scandals, promised me an inquiry; and the investigators decided that 'this Angelina, being the daughter of a wanton, was perhaps not as innocent as her grandfather claimed.'

"Thus all I effected was that the portals of the monastery opened, six months after the day when they had closed upon my child, and Angelina fell into my arms. But this was no longer my granddaughter; it was a ghost.

"The sound of her voice I could no longer hear. But neither did she speak, having nearly lost her reason; and she died at the end of three weeks.

"I withdrew from the world. I abandoned the farm. I have since let nothing but dry bread and water pass my lips, that I may make an end more quickly.

"But, as you see, death itself is cruel to the unfortunate!"

The horse, they say, does not wait for an invitation to eat oats, but the haïdouc waits for even less urging to an act of vengeance.

When we were again assembled round the fire, and our captain had studied the grave faces of her men, she read only one answer, from one end of the row to the other.

"Yes," said all of those bronzed faces, coppery in the twilight, "punish the Superior of Orbou! We must!"

"Then, friends, it is understood," Floarea Codrilor concluded. "But I warn you that of all the potentates of the earth, the religious ones know best how to defend themselves!"

"So much the worse for them!" we cried. Spilca the Monk cried the loudest of all.

But Ely the Wise had not spoken. All eyes turned to him.

"What say you, Ely?"

"I agree with Floarea—the religious know best how to defend themselves, both on earth and in heaven."

"That is not all," the captain resumed. "You do not know that the Superior of Orbou is the former prior of the monastery of Snagov, the terrible Father Kiriatic."

"That Father Kiriatic? That monster?"

"Exactly! The man whose intrigues chopped off the heads of three fine boyars, sincere patriots, and then unleashed a terror that decimated the population of an entire province. Now, what you do not know is that this beast is well acquainted with me. I lived in Snagov while he was there. I was his guest and he was my guest, until he had revealed what he was later to be. When I was telling you of myself, I did not think it necessary to tell you of my whole life. You yourselves did not do so, either. People come to know each other at length.

"Well, then, before leaving for Constantinople, I had a house in Snagov, near Bucharest, which in its time was visited by what is called the élite of the country. That house still exists, and still belongs to me. It is there that I first operated as a haïdouc, after my fashion; that is to say, I did as much good as I could to the people, and as much harm as I could to their enemies, but without overstepping the law. On the contrary, I was protected by it. A matter of feminine guile. I hope to do so again, and with you, if you wish, for the best haïdouc is he who bends the law to his own task.

"So we have a holy man to deal with; and this holy man is Father Kiriatic, and this Father Kiriatic *knows me*.

"There is a fourth point, and the most important of all—it is the *unforeseen* which causes most of the misfortunes of life.

"This is not a case for blind courage alone. I think all of you are brave enough to break your heads against the plated doors of such a fortress as the Orbou monastery. But afterwards?

"No, my friends! It is easy to die. To live is less easy. And now I am going to think of all the obstacles, as we proceed to Orbou. Do you the same!"

Four hours of rough riding, through a dark night, brought us to the heavy wood which dominates Orbou. Men and beasts were covered with scratches from the brambles and branches. Our mood, and that of the horses, were none of the friendliest. And the damp . . . the damp! Our very pockets were wet. Cursed season!

And the dawn of that day announced itself as gloomy as the uncertainty of our enterprise. The entire valley administered by the prior was engulfed in a sea

of motionless mist, as sinister as the frightful monastery whose greyish mass, planted on an eminence, emerged cynical from the fog.

Movila, our vataf, shook his fist menacingly at it. The tinkle of a bell, barely audible, was his answer. The monks were going in file to pray to God that the reign of the cloisters might never end on earth.

We wanted a fire, that best friend of the haïdouc after gun, horse, and wine. Floarea opposed our wish.

"No fire! We are now on the edge of the wood, and the smoke would betray us. But as we must spend all the day here, and much of the night, and since we cannot shiver for fifteen whole hours, do you know how to make a fire without smoke?"

No one could answer.

"Well, go two kilometres from here, and you will find a charcoal shed. In exchange for this calabash of brandy, the workmen will let you take as much charcoal as you wish. Hide your weapons, and don't talk too much."

The faces, which had darkened, now lit up.

"Long life to you, Captain!" Movila cried. "Ah, now I am sure of it! The prior, this coming night, will have little joy of your wooing!"

Two men went off at a run and returned in less than an hour, each one carrying a bag of charcoal on his back.

"Light it in small quantities, and feed the fire as sparingly," Floarea ordered.

Then, when the warmth and the steaming hot coffee from our mess-cans had heartened us, she revealed her plan:

"You well know that the haïdoucs have the habit of throwing themselves on the enemy, and killing with-

out much heed for the innocent blood that they shed. Now, we must act thus only in extreme cases. Let us never forget that the servants who defend a master do not always do so enthusiastically. They must be spared as much as possible.

"This evening there will be no attack, if things go the way I assume they will. See: at about ten o'clock I will announce myself, with my son, Jeremy, to the prior, asking hospitality for the night. Two men will constitute my retinue. One will be Ely. And the other?"

"I!" said Spilca. "I have been a monk, and I know their habits."

"Very well. Ely and Spilca will attend us. Now, listen! The task is for us to carry through, after the following plan. Every monastery has a guard monk, who watches through the night, and an assistant who is a gipsy slave, strong, intrepid, and dangerous. The moment we are received—as we certainly shall be, for I will give my real name—these two men must be watched closely by Ely and Spilca, who will remain below at the alms-house. If they act suspiciously—that is to say, if the prior slips in an extra sentry on our account—then you must quietly put the men out of the way and seize possession of the door. Do not slay the gipsy porter unless he first refuses the proposal that you will make him to follow us.

"So far, that is all. As for the prior, I will take care of him, alone or else aided by Jeremy, according to the circumstances. I hope to succeed, counting on the three points which only a moment ago stood against us: he is a holy man, and therefore a man always enchanted at encountering a lovely woman; this holy man is Father Kiriak, a monster, who will fear nothing, pre-

cisely because he is powerful; and finally, he knows me as the former lively woman of Snagov, a great dealer in silks from the Levant.

"But—you see! The fourth point goes against us—the unforeseen. That it is useless to discuss. All we can do is to face it, when it presents itself!

"In case, then, that the unforeseen overthrows my plan, Movila, who will wait here with his fourteen men, will know it if midnight passes and we do not reappear. Perhaps we shall not be dead, but prisoners. Then you must knock at the door of the monastery, still asking shelter, overpower the guards by surprise, and storm the place.

"But in case of an extremity, be prepared for every misfortune."

Decidedly, the old comrades of Cosma were not accustomed to a captain who could calculate so coolly. They preferred to heat their heads with wine, not to anticipate too much, to dare greatly. As for the issue of an adventure, that was a question of luck. And then, one dies only once.

Instead of this, they were now asked to become wagoners, to uplift a whole brutish people, and to don gloves to destroy a nest of vipers.

And the treasure of the monastery? Was that not to be touched, either? Floarea Codrilor had passed over it in noble silence. But young blood does not get drunk on such austerities.

That is why Ely took Movila apart, and said:

"You must not wait with the men until midnight. This monastery is one of the richest. If we do not come out of it to climb the gallows, we must come out of it laden with gold. So follow us, an hour after our de-

parture from here, and stand at a gun's range. At the first sign, make haste. And act as if the captain were absent."

Movila passed this order on to the haïdoucs, who were cleaning their arms, and it cheered them somewhat. Ely, like the wise man he was, knew how to raise their spirits still more. He set out with three men, to the devil knows where, and returned, late in the afternoon, with a fine sheep on his shoulders. His three companions each carried a demijohn containing ten okas of wine.

All these good things went to fill up voids which certainly are not calculated to give a man courage. Fasts and prayers are hardly relished by the haïdoucs. Floarea herself shared the repast, though ordinarily she nibbled fastidiously at her food, like a real domnitza.

During this time the sun was bidding his adieux by abruptly piercing the bed of fog. Bands of red, superposed, ploughed the sky at the horizon. A few beams glided through the tree trunks and gilded our faces. Ely played softly on his flute.

Our captain rose, opened her pack, and drew forth her most precious ornaments: an ermine cloak; a pair of wide pantaloons of embroidered silk, such as Turkish women wear in place of skirts; a short vest of velvet; a Persian neckerchief, adorned with golden butterflies. She bedecked herself with all her rings and with a diadem, and slipped into her belt a tiny dagger, the point of which was poisoned.

As the son of such a glorious woman, I was made to put on my astrakhan bonnet and my Russian patent-leather boots, and to adjust my clothing according to the circumstance. Spilca and Ely also altered their

guise, so as to look as much as possible like honest peasants; but they loaded their belts with pistols and cutlasses. They alone could carry their arms outside their garments, in plain sight and openly, as is done by every man in the retinue of a rich person travelling over dangerous roads.

Night plunged the world in darkness.

"Cover the brazier with ashes," the captain said.

Soon afterwards our four mounts took the monastery path.

It was a vast rectangular building, surrounded with walls and built on a promontory remote from every habitation. No light could be seen, either in the work yard or in the yard for visitors.

We knocked at the door of the latter, which opened to every comer wishing to pass the night in the arkhonderie.³⁷ A bell tinkled to announce us; then the portal, heavily mounted with iron, turned on its hinges, and a monk, lantern in hand, opened to let us pass.

Holding our horses by the bit, we entered the courtyard, when suddenly, in the feeble lantern light, a devil rose up in front of us—and we truly believed in the devil, haïdoucs though we were. The monk, embarrassed by our terror, explained:

"It is only a gipsy slave who ran away. He was caught and put into irons, as is the custom in this part of the country."

The irons and the custom, of which we had heard, were nothing more or less than a barbarity. The tzigane who stood in front of us, a very colossus of a man, had lost all appearance of a human being. Enormous iron horns stood out from either side of his head. They were riveted to a circle, likewise of iron, which en-

³⁷ Rooms reserved for guests.

closed his cranium at the level of his brow; and this band, so that it might not be removed, was in turn fixed, by means of two vertical plates, to another circle which encompassed his neck.

The man also dragged at his right ankle a long chain, the extremity of which was fixed to the wall beside his kennel. And the wretch had to live in this state, do his work, and sleep all night, martyred by his horns and the other paraphernalia.

Our leader gazed at him for a long moment, trembling with rage. He also looked at us, with human eyes; but only God knows what passed in his brain.

His herculean body, sculpturesque and almost naked, was loathsomely dirty. Huge moustaches, black like the rest of his face, fell almost down to his breast.

The monk shut the portal, led our animals to the stable, and requested us to follow him. Floarea asked him to announce us to the Superior.

"His Holiness is not receiving today," the guard answered.

"Please tell him that it is joupaneassa Floritchica, of Snagov, who is visiting him. He will receive us."

The guard went away with short steps, his lantern in his hand; but when he was in the middle of the yard, he suddenly turned round.

"Follow me into the waiting-room. It is too far for me to go back and forth twice, in case you are received."

We went through a long passageway which reeked of mould, then through an interminable gallery which ended in a refectory full of cupboards and closets, and finally we found ourselves in the waiting-room, a chamber dimly lit by two night lamps.

Here, the terrible unforeseen, of which Floarea

had spoken, suddenly struck like lightning. At the moment of leaving us to consult the prior, the monk lifted the lantern up to the level of our faces and examined us brazenly. His glance meeting that of Spilca, the two men stared at each other and recoiled; but only for the fraction of a second. Then the guard lowered his head and disappeared through a door.

When we were alone, Spilca beat his cheeks with his hands and whispered to us between his teeth:

"We are lost! That monk knew me at Mount Athos, where I killed my prior, who was also his. He is going to denounce me."

His consternation silenced us for several moments. . . . Ely had just time enough to whisper to the captain:

"Keep calm. We will yet accomplish what is necessary. Our men will soon be under the walls of the monastery."

The door opened. Father Kiriac appeared, wrapped in a long baize cloak, his head bare. He proved to be a great, big-bellied fellow, with a red face and epileptic eyes.

Simulating a courtesy which barely disguised his uneasiness, he exclaimed, in the broken voice of a lazy drinker:

"Well, Floritchica! Or rather, Domnitza of Snagov, as the peasants and boyars used to call you. Well, enter! As for the company of Madame, let it follow the guard friar."

As he pronounced the word "company," he gazed intently into the eyes of Spilca.

"Of this company," Floarea replied, "this young man is my son, Jeremy. If you do not mind too much, I should like to have him remain with me."

"Ah, your son? So you have a son! I did not know. Well, let him wait a minute in this room. Enter you first!"

He kept his position by his door, and failed to give us the customary blessing.

Floarea calmly passed into the room of the prior, who closed the door.

Now, we knew what we were to do; but did the guard know?

Motionless for an instant, his chin glued to his breast, he seemed to be dreamily contemplating the ground which was to swallow him up before the minute of time given by the prior had elapsed. Then, suddenly, he began to run with short strides, followed by Spilca and Ely, traversed the waiting-room, then the refectory, and tried to open the door of the gallery.

There!

With a panther-like leap, Spilca jumped on him and gagged him. A second afterwards, his heart received Ely's cutlass, without a cry, without a groan.

We wrested the key of the door from him. His convulsive body was at once hurled into a cupboard. And the two friends fled toward safety.

From the waiting-room, in apprehension from one second to the other of the reappearance of the prior, I watched the brief scene of the assassination with the tranquillity of a man whose eyes follow the movements of a cat playing with a ball of thread. When it was over, I closed the door of the refectory and resumed my place.

After less than a quarter of an hour, "His Holiness" opened the door and called me.

"I hope I have not made you wait too long," he said, in a cold, gruff voice that astonished me, so malicious did I find it.

His face also had thrown off its mask of forced amiability. What had happened? I would have given earth and heaven to know, but from the glance I exchanged with Floarea to announce that all was as it should be, I could divine nothing.

We were in the library and reception room, whose extreme simplicity, or, rather, whose lack of comfort, proved nothing other but the affectation of poverty habitual to ecclesiastics. In the middle of the room stood a large, worm-eaten table and some crippled chairs.

The prior sat down, and invited me to do likewise. Then, addressing Floarea:

"Have you been long from Constantinople?" he asked, aggressively staring at her between his bushy, reddish eyelashes.

"Several months . . ."

"And it was in the company, if I am not mistaken, of the archon Samourakis that you returned?"

"Why that question?"

"Because the archon was a good friend to me!"

"Well, yes! We came together."

"And it was together that you dwelt in his house, near Sereth! No?"

Our friend apprehended disaster, and calmly accepted it:

"I see, Father Kiriac, that, after suggesting a moment ago that I spend the night with you, it is to a real inquisition that you are now submitting me!"

"Just so, dear domnitza of Snagov; and you must explain to me the mystery of that adventure which cost the life of the archon!"

"I have nothing to explain to you . . ."

"We shall see."

As he was seated near the door by which we had

entered, he softly rose, locked it, and put the key into his pocket—a motion which made me clap my hand to my pistols, but Floritchica made me a quick signal not to act. And rightly, for at the same moment a two-leaved door opened behind us and four men entered. They bound us, in the twinkling of an eye. We offered no resistance.

Standing in the middle of the room, gloomy as an executioner, the prior sought to confound us with his goose eyes. Floarea said to him:

“Did you know, six years ago, a young Bissoca girl called Angelina?”

“Perhaps.”

“And by employing similar methods with her, you conquered her resistance to your charms?”

“Not altogether.”

“And you do not think that, in taking me for an Angelina, you might get a broken jaw for your pains?”

“I don’t exactly see how, for at this moment your two companions must have already confessed the purpose of your visit to the monastery of Orbou. I will be less cruel to you than my men have perhaps been to your companions, if you are now willing to confess your impious part in the assassination of the archon Samourakis.”

“My impious part? You talk of impiety? You, who ravish young girls, violate them, and then assassinate them? You, who cut off heads and wipe out innocent settlements? You, who put iron horns on beings that serve you and that God has endowed with speech? It is you who speak of impiety? You! Monkish filth!”

I have never seen Floarea Codrilor so beautiful as at that moment, with her hands bound behind her,

her face flaming with rage, her head, adorned with the diadem, flung back, and her dark eyes wide and darting fire.

Grown pallid, the prior asked for a pair of scissors. Seated on the chair, the fair haïdouc did not falter. He removed her diadem and cloak, cut her clothes from the neck downward, removed the strips, and, exhibiting her bare back, cried to one of his jailers, who was holding an ox whip in his hand:

"Strike once."

Then, intently regarding Floarea:

"It is useless to make an outcry. Here no noise is heard but what I wish heard!"

The beast struck pitilessly. A red line, which at once became blue, appeared across the shoulder-blades.

Not a murmur. Only the body trembled . . . I was proud to be the son of such a woman!

"Confess, adventuress!" shouted the holy man.

There was no answer.

A sign from the Superior was followed by a second blow, which shook the victim. The first welt, broken in two places, caused the blood to pour copiously.

Still not a cry. Ah, how great was my desire to take her place and prove to her that I, too, was a haïdouc!

Facing the glass case, full of holy books, our captain was perhaps meditating on so much merciful wisdom that was being turned into an instrument of torture, when the handle of the door into the waiting-room moved lightly.

The prior heard the slight sound of the lock, and started.

"Is that you, Marco? What is the matter?"

The answer, which came immediately, was a detonation that shook the building. The door flew against the prior, who was thrown on his back; and in the doorway one saw the dark mass of the horned tzigane, and behind him the haïdoucs. The noise and confusion were such that no one had time to ask himself what had happened. Armed with sacks and cords, the tzigane on one side, our fellows on the other, quickly pinioned the prior and his four blackguards, and covered their heads until they stifled. And this work was hardly accomplished when the slave, abandoning his master, indulged in such a massacre as I have never seen in my whole haïdouc life. Swinging, sling-like, in his hand the heavy chain which he had dragged at his ankle an hour before, he repeatedly flung it against the heads of the four myrmidons lying on the ground. Sacks, bones, and brains were soon no more than a horrible mass. Then, without a word, the terrible demon returned to the prior, the chief object of his vengeance, tore away the rags, and bared the head; then, with one knee on the prior's breast, his face almost against the prior's face, his enormous hands began a sort of slow strangulation. The tyrant monk seemed half dead: when the pressure lasted too long, his eyes remained closed a long time before opening. In those instants, the tzigane bounded through the whole room, threw himself upon his victim, bit his nose, his ears, his neck, and slashed at him with his iron horns so furiously that he wounded his own forehead with the irons till the blood streamed down his face.

Then, gathering up his chain, he ground out the man's brains.

During this time, our friends had freed our hands

and thereafter rifled Father Kiriak's room, which rewarded them with a great booty.

The bells of the Orbou monastery were calling the monks to midnight prayer, when our troop, enriched by ten thousand ducats and a former slave freed of his horns, followed the path of its destiny.

Only Floritchica had any cause for complaint.

III

Tazlau

"A THOUSAND and a thousand sorrows in a lifetime eat into the soul of a generous man; but of these none is so painful to him as the suffering of his neighbour. That expresses the haïdouc soul.

"The earth is so beautiful, our senses so powerful, and the necessities of the mouth so base, that truly one must have come into the world without eyes, without heart, and with only the need of devouring, if one can reduce oneself to crushing one's fellow man and making existence an ugly thing, instead of preferring justice, mercy, and the right of others to happiness.

"It is in this that the haïdouc stands apart from society, from the society of the devourers, and becomes its enemy.

"He is not cruel. He is in no degree sanguinary. If he kills, it is because the cruelty of his enemies forces him to do so.

"The haïdouc is a man born kind, and only kindness distinguishes us from the animal: that is the only distinction of human life.

"While taking to the forest and outlawing him-

self, every true haïdouc remains kind, without rancour, and tolerant toward error. He never forgets that what makes the greatness of a leader is, above all, understanding. Were it not so, the gospodars themselves could lead. Neither does the haïdouc forget that he is a generous rebel. For him, murder and pillage are not in themselves an end.

"The haïdouc is not a common bandit.

"Every man must become a haïdouc if the world is to be made a better place."

It was with these words that Floarea Codrilor opened the haïdouc assembly of Tazlau.

There were present the four most illustrious figures of that time: Groza, Jiano, Codreano, and Boujor. The men who accompanied them numbered about two hundred—a sympathetic assembly of brothers, moved by the same sentiments, pursued by the same poteri, and menaced by the same fate.

An age-old forest, much of it virgin, protected them from any surprise. The bear, the wolf, the boar, and the marmot were its inhabitants, less unjust and dangerous than man. One felt their presence, but was undisturbed: the honest beasts contented themselves with tearing today a sheep, tomorrow a half-wild pig, and fled from the being whom no animal exceeds in gluttony.

The camp of the outlaws was a vast prairie, bordered with brakes. It was fragrant with the odour of melilot, borne by the wind from the near-by countryside. Just below, far down, the tumultuous Faucon hurled itself violently into the arms of its elder brother, the Tazlau, which received it with murmurs of friendly reproach, while the blackbirds, as if vexed at their in-

ability to drown out the thunder of the torrent, clamoured with rage.

All this gathering of haïdoucs had been awaiting us here for several days. The appearance of our captain, on her dusky courser, was hailed by the flinging of two hundred bonnets toward the tree-tops.

"Long live Floarea Codrilor!"

"Long live the woman haïdouc!"

Groza, her childhood friend, and the cantor Joakime, their preceptor in Greek, darted forward the first to embrace her. The other chiefs followed suit, with the absence of ceremony characteristic of haïdoucs. She welcomed them all with the rapture of an ardent sister, but her tenderest caresses went to the good Joakime.

"My friend, my lover! How you have aged! Can you love me as ever? Have you become accustomed to the life of a haïdouc?"

The cantor lamented:

"Oh, Floritchica, my loves no longer have to do with this world, and the haïdouc's life is a heart-felt sigh. I live like the trees, which do no harm to God's birds. Morning and evening, I am astounded by all I see, and I weep much."

We were surprised to learn that the news of our victory at the monastery had preceded us; although, according to the captains, its authors were unknown, and Groza was suspected.

This exploit was considered audacious for such a mere handful of men as we were, and it gave Floarea all the prestige she required to speak with authority to four chiefs and two hundred haïdoucs, who were among the most famous in the land.

She struck a mighty blow at the primitive outlawry, by professing from the outset her scorn for every rebel who was not double-lined with idealism, and continued boldly to develop her ideas:

"It is easier to kill a man than to convince him. The people have always taken less time to obey the orders of the chiefs who sent them to massacre than they have taken to persuade themselves of the truth of a wise word.

"Therein lies the ill from which humanity suffers; but no one is to blame for this ill, and that is why we must tolerate it. We must understand life as it is, as we see it.

"The human substance is of a quite diverse composition: the good quality is rare in it and finds itself overrun by the evil. The nutritive vegetables and the flowers are choked out by the weeds.

"Whose is the fault, if the world be as it is? Its tyrants did not descend from the moon to terrorize it, but came directly out of the human family. One is either a slave or an enslaver—there you have the two aspects of the matter, as seen by the majority of men. The mean between these two frightful extremities of life—the just man—is as rare as a diamond among pebbles.

"Take nine hundred and ninety-nine inhabitants of the earth out of a thousand, and study them. They are lowly. Feel their skulls, and you will find the bump of the tyrant.

"There is hardly a single wretch who does not tyrannize over another more wretched, if it be only his wife, his donkey, or his dog.

"So talk not to me of a humanity divided into the

high and the low. I know only the line which separates the just from the unjust, the good from the evil!

"To divide the world into those above and those below; to attribute to the first all of the faults and to the second all of the qualities, and to seek to destroy the former in order to deliver the earth over to the others, is not at all to change life as it is today, for it is rare to find the strangler who has never wished to be the strangler. Yet the great criminals are incontestably the men who govern the world and who fail in their one duty, which is to force the world to observe justice, by first being just themselves.

"These are the criminals whom the haïdouc must pursue; for, if man is not to blame for being wicked and greedy as long as he is enslaved, his fault turns to a crime against the State, the moment he takes the helm of a people the better to reduce it.

"Haïdoucs! Until the pack of wolves becomes a flock of sheep, our hope of a better life must be fixed on the men who suffer. They are of two kinds: those who exist in difficulties, and those tortured by the generosity of their hearts.

"I cannot tell you which of the two types would be the most firm in goodness, but I know that, as long as a man suffers, one may trust him.

"On the other hand, we must make war without truce against every man who remains indifferent in the presence of universal misery, and more especially, against him who is in a position to administer justice, and does not do so.

"This indifferent man must be hunted down and considered as our enemy, even though he be our own brother, for it is especially to indifference, to the indifferent, that tyrants owe their power.

"And we must likewise seek out the hero who sympathizes with the underdogs of life, particularly when he is a man of fortune, and even a man of power. They are not numerous, these heroes, but they exist; I know several, and I know them to be ready to stake their all for the salvation of their country. Do them not the wrong of confusing them with the dazzling horde of tyrants that encircles them. It would be a proof of crying injustice to deny a man generosity, goodness, and integrity, merely because his birth has placed him among the stranglers. Who is ever born where he would wish to be? And what is the social environment in which a just man would feel himself to be the most advantageously placed?

"We have a striking example right here among us, in our friend Jiano. He was born to fortune and nobility, the younger son of a line of brothers who are all our enemies, and he might himself have been one, if his haïdouc soul had not compelled him to abandon that life for the life of the haïdouc. Today, Jiano shares our life and fortunes; there is a price on his head, as there is on ours, and it is not impossible that he will end on the gibbet, son of a great boyar though he be.

"Well, Jiano is not the only boyar with a haïdouc heart. But not every one can make his way to the mountains. Besides, I strongly doubt that the best element of our movement is that which is outside the law; and that is why, to this day, supported by an enthusiastic younger element, I have functioned, first at Snagov and later at Constantinople, more usefully than all the haïdoucs who operate in the codrou.

"It was due in part to my associations with the French and English ambassadors in Stamboul, General

Aupick and Lord Canning, that the rapacious Michael Stourdza was deposed and the humane Gregory Ghica mounted the Moldavian throne. Likewise, it was I, at Broussa, who protected the group of young boyars who attempted their miniature '1848' and were exiled into Anatolia. I contributed to their repatriation, and am still in close contact with them. They have a western education; oppression horrifies them, whether it be the act of strangers or of our compatriots, and to vanquish it they will accept the aid of all patriots.

"Their leader is a man on whose good faith I pledge my head. You will convince yourselves of this, for I have invited him, too, to be present at this meeting; and he will not fail to come from Jasay. He is Miron the hetman, whom I manoeuvred into the post of commandant of the Moldavian militia. . . ."

A murmur of astonishment drowned the last words of the speaker. Groza exclaimed:

"A hetman among the haïdoucs!"

"Yes," Floarea replied, "a haïdouc hetman!"

Jiano rose—an aristocrat with a finely chiselled face, graceful movements, and an air of constant gravity. He said, with fervour:

"Be not alarmed! Floritchica is in no wise mistaken. I know Miron. He is my friend. We were educated together at Paris and Lunéville. He is indeed a haïdouc. If he is hetman of the Moldavian militia, so much the better for the country which we wish to create!"

"We could do nothing lasting without the help of his youth movement," our captain affirmed. "It is not by killing here and there, now a Greek, now a Roumanian boyar, that we shall change by an iota the condition of our country. The life of tyrants interests us

not at all; their death hardly satisfies us. What we need is the land which they have stolen from the peasant, and good laws for everybody. These can be obtained only by replacing the absolutism of today with a juster order having for its foundation the people themselves.

"But where is the popular will to impel new men to this task? It is non-existent. The people are kept out of touch with all the movement of ideas. Then, if not with the people, with whom shall we begin? With you, the idealists who come from below, and with the dissatisfied Mirons who come to us from above.

"And this is what I propose to you. The charms of a woman are not made to bewitch trees. Let me go, then, to do haïdouc service in those places where there are strong men who bend like willows before a false caress. Those who bend not, break like glass, and that amounts to the same thing for the kind of wooer that I am.

"At Snagov, near Bucharest, and, much more, nearer the famous Vlassia codrou, where so many tyrants have left their purses at the same time as their lives, many men have bent before the domnitza of Snagov. Others have broken; and certain ones, proud of their own cruelty, have convinced themselves pitifully that the hardness of a woman has no equal.

"I will return to my house, which will become the house of the haïdoucs. I will open wide its doors, and from time to time we shall close them upon certain powerful ones who are too much of a nuisance. These affairs will cost us no more than a gag and a heavy stone; the deep pool mirroring my balconies and projecting roofs will take care of the rest.

"We will flatter the imbecility of the great who

clude our operations. To those who will accept bargains, we will show our cards and pay ready money.

"If I must slip my fingers through some white beard, in order to save a comrade from the gibbet, I will willingly do so.

"But above all, above all, we shall be sincere with the sincere, honest with the honest, just with the just, good with the good, in this house of haïdoucs which will have but one reason for being: and that, to obtain justice for this poor country, to obtain or wrest justice from men. For the whole tactics of a man of hope is to begin by opening his heart, ready to embrace the very stone which he will warm with the heat of his blood; but if then his reception is a spitting in the face, to trample underfoot all that is evil, for it is not men merely who must form Humanity, but *good* men.

"This is what my life has taught me.

"I have learned, moreover, to make great allowances for the man who lacks bread through the fault of his brother. Hunger devours the spirit, and it is then that the human being falls below the beast.

"This man is, then, no more than a belly. How shall one speak to a belly? How shall one say to him who smells the ground in order to dig out a bone: 'Lift your brow, my brother, and look at the sun'?

"Alas, I know that people divide their lives between smelling the ground through need and contemplating the sun through vanity; but I prefer a vain person to a hungry one. We are all like this. The proof is our haïdouc life. And that is why I say to you: Let us work first with the animal who can listen to us; then, afterwards, we will address ourselves to him who cannot."

At this moment appeared the slender figure of Miron the hetman, accompanied by his guide. The young boyar was in civilian garb. He wore the frock-coat of his period, and red leather boots. He threw himself into the open arms of Jiano, who clasped him as if to stifle him; then, turning to Floritchica, he held her hand to his lips a long time, and said to her:

"Of what 'animal' were you speaking?"

"I spoke of two animals."

"And which is the one who *can* listen to you?"

"You! You are not hungry."

"Your pardon, but I am as hungry as a wolf!"

"Well," the captain said, "we will begin by feeding ourselves. We will listen afterwards. I fancy that your state of hunger is general."

Movila pleased everybody by crying:

"This instant! They are just ready to split."

He meant the sheep, of which no fewer than thirty were cooking, each one in its little trench heated like an oven, each in its skin, and buried in a pile of cinders—a long row of tombs, like a cemetery of children, but the heat of which was infernal. The beast undergoes no preparation: one kills it, stuffs it with salt and pepper, buries it in this extremely hot bed, where, enveloped in a pile of live coals, it "splits," a sign that it is ready to eat. This is called mutton cooked "*à la haïdouc*."

They split in succession, throwing their not very pleasant coverings into the air. Each detonation was hailed by ogish cries.

And naturally, the first ones ready were served to the chiefs, for chiefs are always and everywhere served the first, even when they are haïdoucs.

During the repast, Floarea informed the hetman

of her project. Miron listened seriously. At the end he said:

"Quite good, and you may count me among the most devoted to our patriotic ideal; but on condition that the exploit of the Orbou monastery is never repeated."

"What, is it already known at Jassy?" Floritchica asked.

"It is known especially at Bucharest, where 'a price of a thousand ducats is placed on the head of the unknown adventuress,' to quote the order of pursuit issued against you."

"Is that the spirit of the new order, of which your generous youth is so proud?" Jiano cried, piqued.

The hetman replied:

"Brother Jiano, I know you as impetuous, but hardly as naïf. All the same, you would not have the Divans of the two countries composed of haïdoucs. And then, permit me to tell you that I do not see the purpose of your individual assassinations."

"Perhaps you see better the results of your mass assassinations, in the ranks of the people!"

"Stop!" cried Floarea Codrilor. "I am your chief here. I forbid you to speak further! We are all animated with the desire to be of accord and to work together for the future. Why should we quarrel about things that are past? He shall be in the right who shall leave behind him a work accomplished. To work, then!"

She fixed on Miron a gaze of challenge.

"Hetman, the hour approaches! I come from Constantinople with the conviction that the Russians will lose the Crimean War. Napoleon assures this in the coming year. But the Turks also will lose the prize of

their victory, at least in what concerns our principalities: France and England will support the Unionists. Our work is already quite advanced among the foreigners. It must be equally advanced in the principalities. To what point have we progressed?

"Daily we gain some grounds. The best men, young or old, are for union. Nevertheless, the Separatists remain quite strong, especially among us here in Moldavia, where the caimacam openly plots against the union of the principalities and buys partisans, here and at Stamboul, hoping to see the throne of Moldavia fall to his lot. This pleases all our enemies—the Russians and Turks and Austrians.

"Yes, but this does not please France, our friend; and she will have the upper hand. So I fear not the caimacam, in spite of the immense fortune of his wife, the richest heiress of the Moldavian country, for this very wife harbours a sympathy for the Unionist idea. Moreover, I have taken care to reveal him in the eyes of the Sublime Porte as a man who has sold himself to the Russians, and is a partisan of Turkish defeat.

"What I fear is our weakness, or our incapacity; for you must know that France, in order to be able to assist us out to the end, asks us to furnish her with proof of the faith of the Roumanian nation, and I know only too well that our poor nation is reduced to some few thousand selfish and ambitious plotters.

"That is why, Hetman Miron, I put all my hope on the Moldavian side, in you and in Alexander Couza, that gay blade whose licence is brutal, who is sensual as a dog, but who is well-disposed and disinterested. If he plays well his rôle in the caimacam army, he will soon be a colonel. Try to inculcate in him some self-

control, and a little hypocrisy. Perhaps you will be his minister, one day!"

"What? Are you thinking of making him the prefect of Galatz?"

"The first Prince of the new Roumania!"

The company of the *haïdoucs* rose like a single man. They had heard of the favourable attitude of this noble, who was severe with the rapacious of his class, simple in his manners, and magnanimous even to scorning every situation worthy of his rank. They considered him as the only man capable of "cutting strips from the flesh of the boyars."

A formidable cheer shook the air. Twenty flutes began to play "Driving in the Game," the maddest of all our peasant dances.

Caught into this sudden enthusiasm, the chiefs ceased to parley further and took each other by the hand. This first circle was surrounded by a second larger one, formed by the staff officers of the five captains; and this, in turn, was surrounded by a third chain of *haïdoucs*. The ground shook under the beat of two hundred feet, stamping heavily.

Boujor and Codreano lustily intoned:

Now the beech leaf is come,
And I have stolen away from the village!
I have hafted my battle-ax;
For, as regards the rich,
I harbour a devilish thought!

Devil take you, rich man:
Rich and thoughtless man,
Who drags me through the village,
Pretending that I have not paid you the tax!

Green leaf of the wild quince tree!
Hey, Jiano, whence come you?
Why, from here, from beyond Jii!
What bought you there, Jianco?
I gave gold and silver
For some five kilos of lead
Which I take to my companions in the forest,
For they are thoughtless wights:
They waste too many bullets;
They cannot fire straight, like myself
Into the living flesh!

AT SNAGOV

In the House of the Haïdoucs

I

FRIENDS who hearken to me, I am a man of eighty years, but one whose heart is untouched by age. If you know not what this means, waste not your time in listening to me. For it means that, in the human motley, there are men whose own life, whose own sufferings, and whose own happiness do not suffice for them, and who feel themselves to be living all the lives on this earth—a thousand beatitudes will not prevent them from hearing a groan; a thousand griefs cannot deprive them of a single joy.

They are the echo men: everything that passes wakens a response in them. At night, they hear the cry of human flesh bitten by the ferocity of pleasure; in the daytime, they writhe with all the bodies lacerated by the bestial pain of work that is unloved.

I am one of these men. I am a haïdouc.

If you are not one of these; if you are contented with your life, and with that of your relatives and friends, or if you are dissatisfied only with what overtakes you and yours, then you will not understand me, for, contrary to your manner of feeling, I love to mingle with everything human, and it is not a matter of indifference to me that my fellow man should live under the rule of justice, or that a lament should be formulated, either by or against him.

Oh, mistake me not for an apostle or saint. No!

I am capable of doing wrong, but my sin is of those which are inevitable in life, and are never a calamity for the world. And, too, where bounty can do naught, I can do no more.

In that house of the haïdoucs whose memory is so dear to me, we have loved and we have been loved. It is this that I remember. Hate? The devil take it! I banish it from my thoughts. We came there with the desire of changing the face of the earth. We succeeded in doing but little, and the recompense was our ruin. Such is the balance-sheet of every life that would aspire to embrace the earth.

But what unforgettable hours we passed there!

First, the domain of Snagov is the oasis of love in that vast Wallachian plain wherein Bucharest is swallowed up as in a desert. Its forest, bathed by a pitiless sun on summer days, is all the more esteemed since it is known to be solitary. Its lake, covering several hundreds of acres, is dotted with a zig-zag line of tufted isles, like enormous mountain bonnets floating adrift on the tide. Game, fish, and shellfish abound there. A wide mantle of reeds, ten feet in height, girdles the lake almost without interruption, offering shelter to the hare, and shade to the thousands of frogs which flee from the summer heat. Some few weeping willows, sorry and out of place, like a row of wild monks, lean over the surface with the stubborn intentness of true confessors. Here and there, the nenuphar, king of purity, emerges with its cortege of sap-swollen palettes, and proudly watches over the lake solitude.

It was not entirely a solitude, for the house of friendship, of love, and of magnanimous endeavours filled the air with its clamours in the times when its lovely mistress sojourned there.

Situated on a promontory which gave it a view over the immense lake, it appeared to be on the point of taking flight, this because of its projecting roofs outstretched like wings. Its doors, windows, galleries, and balconies were all sheltered against the inclemencies of the weather. But it had no wall of enclosure, not even a hedge or a palisade; nothing defended it from the world outside. Here and there, kiosks overran with hops. Somewhat to one side was the noisy yard of the household labourers, with domestic animals of every description: horses, cows, sheep, and pigs; and the poultry yard, with its innumerable chickens, geese, ducks, pigeons, and peacocks. Huge shepherd dogs were its sole guard. A dozen tzigane households, quintupled by the number of their children, lived here free in a time when slavery was general. In this province, these were the first gipsies restored to liberty. Floritchica, buying them like cattle along with the domain, made a public act of liberation. She took no pride in this, but derived much satisfaction from it, since the gipsies became her most devoted friends. Some of them were "sedentary;" the others, from the end of April until September, went in vagabondage through all the country, plying their various trades: they were bear dancers, locksmiths, tinsmiths, kettle-menders, and primitive artisans of wooden spoons and of wash-tubs, while their wives practised the art of fortune-telling.

By the irony of fate, the people of all the world the most avid for liberty were subjected to slavery by the representatives of the most enslaved of all the nations oppressed by the Grand Turk! The thrones of the Roumanian principalities were sold in Stamboul at auction; but at secret auction, the purpose of which was dissimulated. The Roumanian boyar, himself a scorned

raïa, sold his tziganes at public auction, as if they were cattle. Nevertheless, the people of this race, half clad and subject to masters who held the power of life and death over them, remained unperturbed in their good humour. They it was who received us with the most sincerity and the most enthusiasm, upon our arrival in Snagov.

A carriage drawn by eight horses had come to take us to Galatz, where Floritchica had had herself announced as returning directly from Constantinople. Only she and I took places in the carriage. Our eighteen companions, transformed into a guard worthy of the "domnitza" of Snagov, followed us on horseback. Their national costumes—made of white stuffs embroidered with multi-coloured wool—aroused the admiration of all the country-folk, always excepting the appearance of the enormous Trasnila, the tzigane whom we had liberated from the Orbou monastery, who frightened the village children. He was terrifying indeed, with his face of a devil and his giant's body, which wore out the sturdiest horse in less than an hour, so that he was compelled to run along on foot most of the time, pulling the animal by the bridle and sweating in great drops. At these times the fright of the peasants turned into hilarity. All through the journey, Floritchica laughed until she wept.

But the most excruciatingly comic happening on this trip was Trasnila's appearance at Snagov. The whole gipsy tribe was out, with its brats, dogs, cats, and even some pigs. Tawny faces, glistening and tragically beaming; eyes lighted by exaltation; white teeth and bare breasts. It was impossible to hear a

word in this tempest of gesture and vociferation. It was a very gay throng, as one could see, but the predominant temper was not clear, and it could easily have been taken for hostility. Pails of water were flung in front of the carriage, as a wish for abundance. The maddening geamparale was danced. The brats rolled on the ground, head foremost. And everybody in this crowd wished to touch with his hands the garments of the mistress.

This was before the happy company had perceived the presence of Trasnila, who followed last in the line.

As soon as the troop paused and the former horn-bearer was discovered by the tribe, stupefaction first silenced every throat, and then the festival, madder than before, precipitated itself unsparingly on the happy Trasnila. Quick work was made of his size, his strength, and his embroidered costume. Tzigane joy knows no limits, and is hard to distinguish from aggression. In the twinkling of an eye, seized by hands, feet, and head, our colossus disappeared under the surge of this crushing affection. They tore at him, and it was impossible to perceive whether it was for the purpose of kissing or of biting him. Still less did the shouting in the tzigane tongue permit of understanding.

Floritchica thought that they were going to lynch him, and she cried with all her strength:

"Don't kill him! He is one of you!"

"Devil take it, we know very well that he is one of us," answered a woman who was watching the *mélée*. "That is why he is being caressed. Such a tzigane slice as he, is worth the trouble of 'eating' a little!"

And now Trasnila, all dusty and disordered, appeared, hoisted above a compact mass who bore him in triumph to Floritchica, shouting in chorus:

"Domnitza, domnitza! We want Trasnila for *bache-boulouck-bacha*!"⁸⁸

The mistress gave the desired consecration.

"So let him be!"

Then, she disappeared into the house, followed by us all, while Trasnila saw himself surrounded by a dancing circle of subjects, happy to have profited by their liberty to give themselves a master.

II

I KNOW not from whom this former shepherdess of Lipia received the charming domain of Snagov. How, and by what stroke of fortune, had the barefooted child of the most thieving village of the province of Buzeu—the friend of Groza, the virgin mistress of Cosma, Floritchica, my mother—how had she become the domnitza of Snagov?

This side of her life always remained obscure to me. Delicacy forbade me to question her, and she never spoke of it to me.

When I came to Snagov, I hoped to discover there the generous person who had gratified her with this altogether princely gift. I found no such being. In a dozen spacious rooms, primitively but comfortably furnished, two women and a man promenaded—life-pensioners, all three of more than uncertain age, humble in appearance and poor in spirit.

⁸⁸ Chief of a number of tzigane communities, each already having its *boulouck-bacha*.

Each one of these three creatures had his own history, which explained his presence in the house of the haïdouc woman; and two of these merit a brief narration. The third, the unfortunate Evghenie, inspired only pity. The younger daughter of parents who were in humble circumstances, but ambitious and heartless, she had been sacrificed for the advantage of her elder sister and placed in a convent, from which, on the death of the cruel authors of her life, she had fled and taken refuge at Snagov. The regular visitors of the house had called her "the nun in spite of herself." And though she was come a little late to the life which had been refused her, Evghenie, quite effaced though she was, succeeded all the same in biting into the fruit which is our main dish "as long as our ears burn and our temples throb," as Cosma said.

Far more lively was the history of the other woman, the happy Marinoula of former days, nicknamed "Madame of the Cavalry" precisely because of the love adventure which had caused her to descend from the ninth heaven of gallantry into the hell of sarcasm.

She was a fashionable boyar lady, whom circumstance had married to a rich lord who was an utter nincompoop. She had the beauty of a peony, the conduct of a goose, the intelligence of a sheep, and of temperament sufficient to exhaust a whole regiment in a single night.

As in the majority of the noble houses of her time, the brilliant officers of the Russian armies of occupation found, at Marinoula's home, lodgings, board, and that supplement which makes Oriental hospitality unforgettable. The happy spouse worried not a bit. As for Marinoula, she was concerned only with the hate-

ful souvenir which the irresistible conquerors, rotten to the marrow, frequently left behind with their imprudent mistresses. For the rest, she cared not a fig.

And, in fact, the misfortune which befell her came not from the innumerable assaults which she was unable to withstand, but from the teasing indifference of a cavalry colonel. The rogue pretended to be preserving the fidelity which he said he owed to his wife. Then, one day, with a Cossack pirouette, he completely turned the head of the poor poppy by declaring:

"Yes, I want you! But for myself alone—only for myself!"

"What —! That —?" she stammered, rapturously.

"Good! You shall follow me! We leave in three days. The Emperor is recalling us."

On the morning of the departure, the colonel found Marinoula snuggling in his sleigh, at the place of rendezvous. And the journey across the snow began, but not before the cavalier had first assured himself that madame was bringing with her her gold and jewels.

The trip was not a long one. Our national divinity would not tolerate the rape of this parcel of Moldavian land.

A night of love at Oungheni; a frank halt in front of the frozen Pruth, ³⁹ a good Cossack drubbing, followed by an equally chivalrous robbery and flight, and Marinoula was awakened from her dream. In front of her was the Holy Russia of her gallant colonel; behind her was a husband who had also recovered from his myopia, and had demanded and secured a divorce.

Furious over the scandal, which had caused a

³⁹ The Russo-Roumanian frontier.

great uproar, her husband permitted her to sink into the most frightful poverty. She sold everything to feed herself, even her furs and the little astrakhan bonnet which she had erstwhile worn so proudly at an angle over one ear. Her virtuous friends, having a considerable reckoning against her for this outrage against proper morals, closed their doors to her.

Dragging her footsteps over the snow, her head wrapped in a shawl, she heard the brats of the streets taunt her, though only for the loss of her bonnet:

Marinoula, Marinoula,

What has become of your catchoula?

One day Floritchica discovered her in this condition; she asked no questions, but offered her hospitality, which lacked in nothing.

Somewhat tragic was the history of the third pensioner, the good Alecaki.

One fine spring morning, while riding in the carriage of the pasha of Silistria, who was making a tour of inspection of his pachalik, Floritchica perceived two Turkish executioners and an aga preparing to behead a man. They dragged him beside a fountain, bound his hands behind his back, and made ready the sword and the block.

Our friend had the carriage stop, and got out:

"I want to know what is the matter here," she said to the old pasha.

"What is the matter?" mewed the satrap. "But, my dear, you can see it all very well! A head is being chopped off. In these days you would hardly wish to stop wherever you see a head being cut off, just in order to know what is the matter!"

But it happened to concern poor Alecaki, who, at

the request of Floritchica, forthwith narrated what follows:

A customs-house officer at Silistria, Alecaki was reputed to be the most honest man of the vilayet. He was a widower. His three children, a boy and two girls, helped him in his work, which for about fifteen years had consisted in remaining seated, Turkish-fashion, on a mattress and collecting the entry duties on the merchandise which arrived at his dock on the Danube. Never had a single complaint been made against him. The contract sums which he owed to the Sultan monthly were received regularly by the aga. The day when Alecaki was no longer solvent, the honest aga collected them in kind. And this is where the matter grows complicated.

The customs officer, affable like all Orientals, passed his time in endlessly chatting with his friends, for whom he always had room on the mattress. Innumerable tiny cups of coffee were drunk and tchiboucks were smoked, while the two daughters and the boy would bring the coins, give them to their father, and return to their posts. Alecaki lifted a corner of the mattress, put the money under it, and continued his entertainment, which lasted until the night. He detested accounts. It was enough if he took the trouble to put the money under the mattress and draw upon it for the small needs of his family.

But he was probably not the only person who was drawing on it, for, at the end of a certain month, when the aga presented himself to claim his due, it was in vain that the customs officer lifted the mattress, turned it upside down, and ransacked the room. He found only a few piastres and irmiliks, here and there. Distressed, he explained to the Sultan's man:

"No business, no money, aga!"

The aga was an Arab, and contented himself with answering by a single word:

"Maleche!"

By which the aga meant: "No matter!" and he retired, all gentleness.

But one day Alecaki perceived that the aga was spending entirely too much time exchanging pleasantries with his daughters, near the landing-place. Nevertheless, as the generous functionary continued to answer "Maleche" at each unfortunate end of the month, the customs officer closed his eyes to what the other man was collecting *in kind*, forgot the deficient accounts of the cursed mattress, and yielded his heart entirely to his good friends—until the time when his eldest daughter came and informed him that she was with child by the aga. Then the father was moved and summoned the malefactor, who answered: "Maleche!" and repaired the evil by forcing a happy-go-lucky raïa to marry the girl-mother.

Shortly afterwards, the second daughter of the customs officer followed the course of the first. There was a new "Maleche" and a second raïa.

Now, Alecaki lived happily. To his monthly deficits, the grateful aga merely responded from a distance with a "*Maleche*," and passed on. The good father had no more daughters to furnish him.

But on the other hand, the aga had two himself. And it was the son of the customs officer who, in his turn, and to avenge his sisters, made them pregnant. After which, he disappeared from sight, without a thought for his poor father, left now on a mattress that had been set on fire.

The consequences of this thoughtless action came

near to being serious. The aga, on that same fine morning when Floritchica went riding in the pasha's carriage, came, accompanied by two executioners, to seek out Alecaki. Being no lover of words, he said merely:

"I have come to cut off your head."

The customs officer understood what was in the air, saw the sword and the block, and felt his hair turn white. Yet he had the strength to ask:

"Why do you wish to cut off my head, aga?"

"Because your son has swollen my two daughters."

"Well, did not you swell mine?"

"Maleche! You did not pay me!"

"But aga! You said that it did not matter."

"Maleche! Get up and follow us."

Floritchica asked the pasha of Silistria to order there and then the liberation of Alecaki, which the good pasha did by simply lifting his index finger. Then our friend placed in the hands of the Sultan's man the sums due to the Sultan.

"And my two pregnant girls?" the Arab cried.

"Maleche, aga!" the domnitza of Snagov replied.

III

THE day following our arrival, we received the visits of the pastor of Snagov and his flock, come to tell us clamourously of their joy at knowing themselves to be again under the protection of "the good domnitza Floritchica." After this reception, the house of the haïdoucs took its first step in the conflict which it was pledged to wage.

It was a comical and, for me, unexpected step. Two important personages alighted one day from a

closed carriage and were received, at the midday meal, with a show of honours which increased the ridiculousness of these men. They were as flat as the bedbugs of an empty house, as disjointed as jumping jacks, and ugly enough to make one die of laughing.

I did indeed nearly die of laughing at sight of them, but Floritchica quickly took me aside, and said:

"Scamp! Learn a little discretion! Do you know who those two men are?"

"I can see who they are—a pair of Cosma's scarecrows."

"Have that as you please, but I would have you know that the man who is wearing a fez and spectacles is Hood Bey, the chief interpreter at the Sublime Porte and our best friend. His companion is Herr Isidore, a German Jew, the representative of several factories which are going to provide our country with all it needs for its inhabitants to cease eating with their fingers, sleeping on the ground, and dressing like Osmanlis."

In Hood Bey, I divined one of the powerful men who had made Floritchica's fortune, but who did not know their friend in all her aspects. He was very rich and spoke nine languages, of which four were Oriental. Among the latter, he knew Roumanian but fairly.

On the other hand, Herr Isidore spoke Roumanian very well, as he did German, French, and English, according to common report.

On his mother's side, the Padischah's interpreter was also Jewish, and the presence of these two men in the house of the haïdoucs found its explanation in the project of the haïdouc woman. She acquainted us with this after luncheon was over.

In the encumbered sofa and divan room, which was reserved for intimates of the house, the English

bey settled himself, as motionless as a mummy, tchibouck in hand and his glasses at the end of his nose. He gazed into space, never opening his mouth except to say yes or no. Of the two Jews, it was he who spoke of gold; that is to say, of pounds sterling.

The other worthy, whose face was more pleasing and whose lively temperament made him more agreeable, ceased not a moment to measure the length and breadth of the room. He smoked good cigarettes and scoffed at the bey's tchibouck, which he called a "nicotine spitoon."

He scoffed, besides, at everything not Occidental.

"Look at this room!" he said. "It is the room of a woman who is cultivated and European. Yet even here you have to squat Turkish-fashion. You do not see a single well-made chair, a chest of drawers, a buffet, or any suitable plate. The richest Roumanian men and women, though infatuated with Western languages and culture, still preserve their Asiatic customs, wash at the fountain, use smelly tapers for light, and make their friends sleep on mattresses thrown on the floor. They speak French and wear chalvars. They keep their clothes in inconvenient chests. It is ridiculous! And it is precisely these Roumanians who have the admirable saying: Speak according to your manner of dressing; or dress according to your manner of speaking."

"I entirely agree with you, Herr Isidore," Floritchica said, approvingly. "In a way, you are a haïdouc!"

"I, a haïdouc!" the representative exclaimed. "Did you ever hear of a Jewish haïdouc? Oh, no! And it is regrettable, for if my nation knew how to use arms, it would not today be the scapegoat of every social calamity."

"I said 'in a way,' and it is true. Do you not strive to spread through the Orient the most *savoir-vivre*, and consequently the most happiness? That is being a *haïdouc*. In this sense, Hood Bey is also a *haïdouc*."

The bey shivered slightly, and nearly dropped his *tchibouck*.

"Explain yourself, *Floritchica*! And in any case, be careful not to tell that to the Sultan. It might cost me my head!"

"Not at all, my friend. Your way of being a *haïdouc* may make revolutions, but it pours gold into the strong-boxes of every industrial power, for it is you who facilitate the flow of their products, by opening credits to the merchants."

Thus reassured, the two "*haïdoucs*" had only to conclude the business on which they had come. Isidore made himself responsible for the installation of several kinds of Jewish merchants; Hood Bey furnished the money, and *Floritchica* guaranteed the transportation of the merchandise between the frontier points and the stores established in several centres of the principalities.

Thus was introduced into Roumania a commerce which, entirely Jewish at first, was later to constitute a source of national energy, and to enable Roumania to take a place among civilized countries.

The reward of the Jews for being the vehicles of progress, and of ourselves for having facilitated it, was quite different from what the initiators anticipated.

Commerce, however, was not an end for *Floarea Codrilor*. She profited by the wealthy classes' need of living in the Western fashion, and by the irresistible pressure of foreign industry toward an outlet in our country, to propagate her *haïdouc* ideas. These were:

the restoration of the land to the peasant; the secularization of the ecclesiastical estates; the abolition of gipsy slavery and of capital punishment; the union of the principalities, and certain constitutional guaranties.

A European Congress was shortly to invite the two nations to formulate their aspirations by electing national assemblies, and it was on these that the future of the Roumanian people depended. Much had therefore to be done to thwart the machinations of the reactionaries and to elect only men in sympathy with the program of our youth.

With this aim, Floritchica dared to undertake the conflict simultaneously at both ends of society: below, by creating a popular movement of support; above, by unmasking the ferocity of the boyars, and by requisitioning every form of energy favourable to the national cause.

But how difficult it was to arouse to action peasants stultified by four centuries of spoliation! How difficult it is ever to move any particle of humanity.

With a truly missionary faith, we set out to conquer the masses. Hundreds of ox carts and horse carriages began to wend their way through the principalities, each convoy having at its head a haïdouc ready to make the right prevail or else to die, and each haïdouc having on his lips the command: "Be men of courage! Demand your rights! Support our good Voda!"

For years, and turn by turn, we had to struggle with rain, mud, snow, wind, suffocating heat, wild beasts, and lice—but it was the inertia of those in whose interest we were striving which gave us the greatest pain.

To the simple man, the power of established authority is an occult thing, whether divine or diabolic

he does not very well know, but before which he can only bow.

My brother in pain, enemy of my liberty, have you not a head, two arms, and legs, like everybody else? Where, then, is your infirmity? How shall I approach you, to strike to the quick the rock of your stupidity, to do you a service, and to wrest back from you the life that you deprive me of!

Bitter as gall was the existence of the haïdouc during those days of forced devotion. Soured from infancy, and embroiled with all those who are not like himself, the haïdouc scorns both the future and death, attaches value only to the moments which he spends in liberty, and is vexed beyond patience if required to convince another person of anything at all. He knows that before he became a haïdouc, he had scattered much saliva to all the winds; but that his speech reached deaf ears only, and prevailed only to bring him against the claws of the authorities of his village. And ultimately, therefore, he has said to himself that one is born a haïdouc, as one is born a singer. And he has broken the bond that bound him to his equals.

Nevertheless, numerous were the companions who volunteered for our thankless task. Their devotion, though forced, was in every way equal to that of inspired fanatics.

At night, when the darkness subdued the gleam of our eyes, we spoke in low voices to the carters who smoked while following their grating, ill-greased wheels. During the peaceful halts in the country, while they dozed, warming their backs against their oxen, which lay ruminating, we spoke to them.

It was not by the simple power of words that we sought to win them to the cause of right—we also

showed them our hearts, by sharing, we who were not obliged to do so, in all of their difficulties, when their wagons stuck in the mud, or when they were overturned in a torrent, when men and beasts were killing themselves at their tasks. Nightly, on easy roads, we remained the sole guides of the convoys, and permitted them to sleep in our carriages. And we always had litres of wine and crust-breakers to offer them, and other trifles for them to take to their families, such as pieces of ribbon and material, broken plates, and knives.

Moreover, we always had a store of compassion and fraternity for the slaves. And when they needed a beast of burden, a plough, a hut, and the necessities for the marriage of a child, then we presented ourselves—we, who earned many ducats, but had no wish to accumulate fortunes.

Sometimes, in their imprudent enthusiasm, the haïdouc chiefs and the domnitza of Snagov herself descended upon a village where our convoys were resting, took part in the marriages and baptisms, danced madly, and scattered money with widely opened hands.

"Friends, brothers!" we then would cry, to faces bruised by suffering. "See how fair life would be for everybody if the tyranny of the gospodars did not exist! Have a little courage, and overthrow the monsters! We will help you!"

IV

PARALLEL with this work among the masses, there was one at Snagov which had much more importance.

To give an example of the welcome she wished to

be accorded to Western customs, Floritchica completely transformed the interior of her house. Clothing, furniture, everything, she replaced with goods from Vienna, Paris, Dresden, and Leipzig. She even emphasized fastidiousness so far as to introduce sugar tongs in the table service. A maître d'hôtel took the place of the famous tzigane sofragiou of the Roumanian boyar, a poor slave who wiped his nose with the same fingers with which, immediately afterwards, he mixed his master's salad.

She furnished the bedrooms comfortably; the beds, of hard wood or varnished iron, were decorated with paintings representing historic scenes, Roumanian and foreign. If you add to this new interior the charm of its mistress, who knew how to receive like a true domnitza and to wear every fashionable garment with an innate grace, you can imagine the popularity which the haïdouc house won among the people of a land lacking neither in wealth nor in the desire to shine, but simply in initiative and the means of satisfying their desires without too much trouble.

Floarea Codrilor opened the doors of her house to whoever wished to enter, and declared herself ready to make the interior of every boyar home similar to that of her own.

Visitors, and with them orders, poured in from every part of the principalities. The "court" of Snagov vied in its receptions with the courts of the two reigning princes. Day and night, six- and eight-horse equipages stopped before the house; and one beheld great white beards (such as were worn only by the nobility of the first rank); one beheld high public dignitaries and their fragile spouses, deigning to accept the hospitality of the "merchant woman," "the intriguer," or

"the adventuress," as the boyars privately called this hostess who equalled them in fortune and surpassed them in *savoir-vivre*.

Floritchica, with a smile on her lips, as lovely and coquettish as those Parisian women so much envied by the women of that epoch, received her visitors, conducted them about, showed them everything, gave dazzling entertainments, and captivated everybody.

But that has nothing to do with the matter.

If, in the midst of the festival, one of those white-bearded sires of the protipendada chanced to stray into the wrong door while wandering through the house, he would surely stumble over the patriarchal beard of Ely the Wise, who, docile but imperturbable, sat Turkish-fashion, awaiting the accomplishment of Justice upon the earth.

He waited and watched. He was the guardian of morals in the house of the haïdoucs.

In no way severe, but rather tolerant, Ely understood everything, excused everything, and his vigilance was calmly exercised, with his gentle eyes, his discreet ears, his calm glance.

Nevertheless, that gentleness, that discretion, that serenity, kept us only the more mindful of the presence of Ely near the celebration, exactly as at the time when Cosma conducted himself as he pleased, but invariably was curbed by the "maddening" silence of the haïdouc patriarch.

Certainly, Floarea Codrilor was not Cosma; and I, Jeremy, took care to be as little as possible his son. At Snagov, we ardently wished to surpass Cosma in the haïdouc spirit; but could we, any better than he, have stifled the cries of our hearts? Can one wish the good

of the world, without experiencing all that is good in life? In other words, can one be a sad haïdouc?

"Rejoice and make merry!" Floritchica would cry to the pilgrim haïdoucs, when they returned from their work among the people. "Eat, drink, love, and strive joyously, so that all the rest of the world may soon do the same. In behaving so, you will have nothing for which to reproach yourselves. He who does not prevent others from living and who strives for universal happiness, has the right to the best in life!"

To the swarm of young girls and boys whom our house of love irresistibly attracted, she said:

"Break with the past! Do not follow the path of your parents! There is no morality—that morality so dear to the aged—where selfishness and hatred are supreme. Of happiness there is even less, for one can not persistently live contrary to the laws of life with impunity. This kind of indulgence provokes an uneasiness which inevitably leads to that infirmity of the soul called restlessness."

And to prove that she knew how to conquer restlessness, the domnitza of Snagov took it upon herself to show everybody the new path which he was to follow.

This "path" was not far from the house, and was followed on the water. A dozen skiffs with cushioned seats were found, as by chance, within the reach of all, in order to facilitate the passage. And how could one then help forgetting hate? How refrain from yielding to the invitation of this pool, in August, on enchanted nights?

Every day, to the guests quartered at Snagov, there were added others who came from Bucharest, in

carriages or on horseback, for the afternoon and a part of the evening. The debates on the controversies of the hour brought men and women to grips. Florit-chica fought like a lioness to win over influential partisans; then fatigue and the heat would moderate the confusion, and pleasantries and flirtations replaced the clash of ideas. The old people went to bed. The mistress of the house took the arm of the radiant Hetman Miron and disappeared.

Ely, from his window which overlooked the lake, would watch the first skiff which detached itself from the bank and gained the open. He said nothing, but he thought much.

The other couples were not slow to follow. One by one, the skiffs left the landing-place, glided over the calm surface of the lake, and disappeared in the nocturnal shadows toward the silent islands, toward the unoccupied bluff opposite. The single guests were the last to leave, and they perforce to their homes.

Then the young tzigane servants extinguished all the lights. The house of the haïdoucs, doors and windows flung wide open, was plunged in obscurity, and it exhaled exciting odours and seemed more spacious than it was.

From his place of vantage, Ely saw all this; and he also saw the sequel, for there was one—it was perhaps the best phase of the gathering.

After the disappearance of the leaders of the popular conspiracy, stealthy haïdoucs sprang up from all sides like rats. Answering their guarded whistles, half a dozen lovely tzigancouchas, the servants who had extinguished the lights, rushed up, bare-legged, eyes glinting in the dark, aquiver with desire. If all the boats were not in use, the new band of lovers em-

barked, and the devil take the hindmost. Otherwise, unable to follow the path traced on the water, they were forced to find their own path in the forest.

Trasnila, the bache-boulouk-bacha, regularly took the same road, without being shown it, and by preference, for he did not like the water. Having become the porter of a house that had neither gate nor portecochère, Trasnila waited until the masters and overservants had disappeared; then, from the kiosk where I smoked my tchibouck, I saw his dark mass appear on a run, holding a big wench in his arms. He petted her, whispered incomprehensible words to her in a tender voice, and hurried with bearlike tread toward the mystery of the woods.

In the balmy night, by the light of the moon, the twinkling sky seemed to have made a prodigious leap in height. The far-off bell of the tiny old monastery of Snagov sent forth the limpid tone of its bronze, the while the trees and rushes and the pool listened in pious immobility.

It was the moment when Marinoula, already made happy, left the arms of her lover—a mettlesome tzigane, endowed with a fine voice; Floritchica's personal coachman. "The poppy" herself sang well. And they both, walking side by side, their heads slightly thrown backward, their bodies slightly forward, sang their favourite song:

And the enemy plotted
To catch us by surprise,
Then chain us elbow to elbow
And exhibit us through the town.

Laughter re-echoed from the balcony where Alecaki, the former customs officer, and Evghenie, "the

nun in spite of herself," passed their time admiring the moonlight.

These two were inseparable, particularly because Evghenie never wearied of questioning Alecaki concerning the circumstances which had almost cost him his life.

At night I heard her interrogate her companion in adversity for the hundredth time.

"Were you very much afraid, Alecaki, that day by the fountain?"

And the other invariably answered:

"Very, very much, Evghenie!"

Sometimes, after the defile of the amorous couples had passed, Evghenie would go to Ely's window and ask him, without any malice in her voice:

"What do you think, Ely, of all these fine folk?"

"Why, I think that they are amusing themselves . . . for the good of the people!" he would reply.

V

WHEN Ely said that the folk in the house of the haïdoucs "amused themselves for the good of the people," a flavour of irony had perhaps found its way into the thought of the honest man.

Yet he spoke the pure truth.

Frank joy pleases everybody, and even delights hypocrites themselves inwardly; for one must believe not so much in the *mischievousness* of man, as in his stupidity.

The proof that the goodness of hearts inclined toward pleasure impresses even the ugliest, was the

importance which Snagov assumed in two years among a reactionary nobility, hostile to every generous idea.

At that date—the time of the triumph of France and England in the Crimea, against the Russia of the Tsars—the most refractory and haughty boyars had finally set foot in our house, and admitted that at least Floritchica was “sincere and disinterested.” They did not declare themselves defeated, because their thirst for honours (the *gargaouni* to reign, as it was called) dominated them all; but our influence on the finest minds of that time was incontestable, and among these we had the pleasure of counting, one evening, two recruits of the first order.

These were the Abbé Uhrich, a Frenchman from Lunéville, an educator of the high Roumanian nobility, and the French Consul, who had but lately arrived at Bucharest. The judgment of these two men outweighed, in the balance of the internal affairs of our country, all the calculations of the reactionary faction.

Elated at their presence, our mistress received them most charmingly, without, however, descending to flattery. She knew that the person who is unyielding in his disinterestedness, may permit himself the luxury of being honest and saying everything.

That day, again, she did not mince her words.

It was in the dead of winter, on New Year's Eve. The snow was as deep as the knees, sleigh bells jangled, and a blast was blowing that snapped the trees. The pool was a field of clear crystal.

In the great reception room, filled with visitors, Unionists and Separatists heckled each other to their hearts' content. The Abbé Uhrich, seated in a corner, was pointing out to the Consul the “hirelings of Rus-

sia," and generally acquainting him with the condition of Roumanian affairs.

"We are in a country where everybody wishes to rule," he was telling him. "It matters little to these men if their internal divisions degrade the principalities and give rise to the most fatal social calamities, provided that each boyar may ascend the throne and maintain himself there for six months. That is called being a Voda. It is easy to understand that the union of the two countries is not calculated to promote these private ambitions."

Floritchica knew the "rightness" of the Abbé Uhrich and the unionist persuasions of the French diplomat, but she did not know to what point she could count on their support. That is why, before opening fire, she held herself a little apart from all the noisy manifestations and quietly observed the abbé and his compatriot.

The latter, like all diplomats, was discreetly bored. The curiosity of his wandering gaze searched rather the feminine side of the assembly, which, as a matter of fact, was distinguished by no great number of lovely ladies. The Consul was still a young man, and seemed inclined to be a mocker.

By contrast, the Abbé Uhrich, advanced in age, small and very thin, was known during the twenty years in which he had travelled through the Roumanian provinces as a man imbued with Christian faith, and an ardent defender of oppressed peoples. The haïdoucs, who had no love for priests, had heard of his goodness and, being unable to remember his name, called him "the haïdouc priest."

I was glad to see him. His face, ravaged by deep wrinkles, pleased me. The interest which he took in our affairs elevated him the more in my esteem. Truly, one

cannot refrain from respecting such men, even though they be ecclesiastics. And as in this very afternoon of the year's end, the Abbé Uhrich was to surprise me by his courageous intervention in our disputes, I ended by loving him.

The occasion arose of itself. Tea was served. The stupidity of our opponents was overwhelmed by the beauty of the service, which was of the finest Saxony porcelain. The old boyar Daniel Crasnaru, celebrated for his fortune and his vanity, the leader of our Separatists, having come to the end of his arguments, thought fit to seize upon this unlucky pottery to exhibit Floritchica in a contradictory light.

"See how you betray your real sentiments!" he cried, cup in hand. "You pretend that you are a friend of the people, but your luxury surpasses ours by far. Wherein do you see a difference between what we are and what you are?"

"I see one, and even several," our mistress replied, boiling with rage beneath her mask of forced calmness.

In the silence which ensued, the eyes of all the guests, friends and enemies alike, were fixed on Floritchica.

"It is true that my luxury surpasses yours, who are—particularly you, Daniel Crasnaru—a hundred times more rich than I. In fact, are you not the absolute master of fifty peasant communities, contained in a single domain which covers many square miles of farm land, forests, preserves, and pastures? Thousands of slaves toil for you alone. They have not a shirt to their backs, and you—you complain that you have not a porcelain plate!

"Is not that a difference? Where are the men who toil for me, and who have reason to complain? What

do I possess, save only this barrack? The land, the wood, the pool? The peasants own them. I pay for all the products that I consume. And with what money? With that which you, the boyars, give to me as the merchant whom you scorn, but who nevertheless teaches you how to live!"

Laughter, mingled with hostile murmurs, ran through the assembly. Crasnaru tried to answer. Floritchica prevented him by an abrupt gesture.

"Your pardon! I have the right to defend myself. You would like to convince men of good faith that I am a despoiler. Ah, no! What you see here is the useful and beautiful, and everybody has the right to strive honestly to vanquish the ugliness of life and to appropriate its beauty to himself. If you restricted yourselves to such simple luxury, slavery would not exist, nor would the misery of the workers!

"But while you are ignorant of the comfort of life and the hygiene of the body, I have seen you, at Constantinople, scatter thousands of gold purses, to buy the thrones of your own countries, as you would buy a donkey. You do not know how to wash yourselves properly, and yet you would become kings! And what is it that you do, when once you have set yourselves astride of the principalities? You sell public offices to the cruelest vampires, to the most terrible extortioners of the nation, who have reduced it to a state of animalism!

"Are you at least happy, in so behaving? Behold, the horrible balance-sheet of your deeds! There is not one person among you whose family does not number one member buried without his head. The very prince who rules today over Moldavia, one of the best of men, had a grandfather who was assassinated by the Sublime

Porte, and the body of his father sleeps decapitated in the Church of Saint Spiridon, at Jassy, while his head rots in some sewer at Constantinople!

"Where does this path lead you? What do you yet need, to find yourselves sated with vanity and riches?

"Be men, boyars! Be good leaders, and the people will permit you to eat in golden plates, if that gives you pleasure!"

Amid the vociferations of the Separatists, Daniel Crasnaru rose to depart. The Abbé Uhrich placed a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Will you accept, Monsieur Crasnaru, the testimony of a stranger? You know me, and if you will admit the truth, you know that my second compatriots, after the French, are you, the Roumanians. But if I have been the teacher of the rich Roumanians, I have always been the friend of the poor. More than that! It was in the hope of being able to render some service to the latter that I have consecrated all my strength to the education of the first.

"Ah well, I must confess my dissatisfaction to you. I blame no person, but I cannot prevent myself from realizing what deplorable conditions still exist here. I have sacrificed a quarter of my life to the instruction of the two sons of a ruling prince whom every one knows. One of the two is crazy; the other beizade has excelled him. Probably to do homage to his abbé teacher, he has taken it into his head to carry a calf on his shoulders, day after day. And he does this in the desire to continue the exercise until the calf becomes an ox, after the example of Milo of Crotona.

"So it is not without disgust that I sometimes hear myself called 'the educator of the calf-beizade.' To

accomplish such a result, it was hardly worth while to bring me here from Lunéville. Yet nowhere in the principalities has Western influence produced better results.

"French is spoken fluently. The young are all Voltairians. The old vie with each other in donations to the churches. Yet, between an obeisance to Voltaire and an alms to Christ, one stretches one's gipsy cook on the ground and, for the slightest fault, applies to his back fifty, a hundred, two hundred lashes. I have seen slaves beaten simply because an enraged boyar did not know on whom to discharge his venom!

"But this question of slavery is much more grave. I hardly think that I am making any revelation to you when I tell you that almost all the boyars, both young and old, make use of the young tzigane girls and even the women married in church, without taking account of the crime which they are committing, without giving heed to the moral suffering of the poor husbands and betrothed, who, although they are slaves, are none the less men. Moreover, to the guests whom they entertain in the country, these good Christians nightly send the same tzigane women and young girls with the mission of *rubbing the feet* of the boyar until he falls asleep. A fine rubbing they give them!

"The same practices are observed in every monastery, which have dens of public vice, veritable harems. The tziganes are considered as cattle: they are coupled off at stated intervals; their wives are summarily disposed of, as are their daughters and their lives.

"As for the peasant—that slave who is neither fed nor housed by a master, and who is free only to perish of hunger—the boyar spares him no more than the tzigane, after having despoiled him of his land. Yet it is common knowledge that, twenty years ago, at

the time of the establishment of the famous 'Organic Rule,' Count Kisselev showed himself more humane with regard to the peasants than to all the Roumanian patriots together. This Russian general, although the adjutant of an absolutist Tsar, like the true Voltairian that he was, did all he could to persuade the country lords to release their hold, proving to them that at the beginning their ancestors were only the chiefs of these peasant communities of which they are today *proprietors by usurpation*. There was nothing to be done: the generous and clear-sighted foreigner was opposed by the *national* greed of the nobles, and he fell.

"Here are some truths for you, gentlemen! Confuse them as you will—they remain truths!

"And now, permit me to declare that I esteem this house, of which I have heard so much evil and so little good! The frankness of its mistress has permitted me to be frank in my turn, and to affirm aloud what I have always believed."

Before this powerful voice of the West, our enemies beat a retreat. No one dared reply. Overwhelmed, Daniel Crasnaru went back to his place. An explicable embarrassment weighed on everybody. It grew dark.

Suddenly, an abrupt tumult in the yard, the cries of wagoners, the sounds of bells, the cracking of whips caused every one present to start up.

The Consul, who was near the window, peered into the darkness. Floritchica, smiling, said to him:

"Do not be alarmed, Monsieur Consul. You will not perceive anything evil."

Still peering out, the Consul answered:

"My faith, what I see is so bizarre—a plough on the snow! Two superb white oxen, all bedecked with

ribbons. Then, six peasants, one of whom rings the bell and speaks rapidly in front of the door; three cracks of the whip, and two others pound a little drum which emits bellowing sounds, in imitation of those of a bull!"

And, turning toward his hostess:

"What is the meaning of this comedy?"

"It is our traditional Plougourshorul, the festival of the plough. This is New Year's Eve, when the peasants go from house to house, wishing all husbandmen a year of abundant harvest. The man whom you say is speaking rapidly is describing to us the agrarian exploits of his elder brother Trajan—a brother eighteen hundred years old, but still living in the heart of the narrator. And merely to understand his wonderful narrative, which is five hundred lines long, would compensate you for the trouble of learning Roumanian."

The Consul rose to depart, as did the Abbé Urich. While giving his hand to Floritchica, the former said:

"You are an astonishing people, and you merit a better fate. Do your duty! France's support is assured you!"

VI

UNDER the impulse of generous anger which rose on all sides, the spring of 1856 brought us two splendid victories—the abolition of the death penalty, and the freeing of the tziganes.

The domnitza of Snagov decided to celebrate the accession of the gayest people of the earth into the ranks of the free, promptly and in an unusual manner. She sent to our friends, and even to several sympathetic adversaries, the following invitation:

"Floritchica gives, this day a week, a luncheon in honour of the freeing of the tziganes. If this event has rejoiced you, come and add your joy to that of the guests who will partake of this luncheon."

We know that the rich frequently eat in honour of the poor, but those who are thus feted never participate in these repasts given in their honour.

It was not so at the Snagov celebration. The table of the masters counted twenty covers. That of the tziganes had a hundred. And the two were as one, placed beside the lake on the young grass.

Naturally, the tziganes had to wash and clothe themselves in their best before appearing at table, for a different habit makes it impossible for even the most gracious lords to endure in their presence the man who works, sweats, and stinks. And though the wretches consumed all the soap in Snagov so as to make themselves tolerable for an hour at the tables of their masters, there were still, nevertheless, even at the height of the enjoyment, sensitive nostrils which made the age-old grimace of the high-born, when caught at a disadvantage.

Floritchica (out of kindness, of course, and also because to do a thing once does not constitute a custom) took it upon herself to scrub the paws of Trasnila and to cut his grimy nails; this action, accomplished in the presence of the whole tribe, won her immortality in the hearts of the tzigane people. Then, at table, she seated him at her right, and counselled him "neither to speak nor drink with a full mouth; not to lean too much forward toward his plate, nor to click his tongue; and, above all, not to dip his fingers in the sauce, so as to suck them afterwards"—instructions which exasper-

ated the vataf of the courtyard, and made him protest, quite earnestly:

"Ah, domnitztza, do you call that liberty?"

This cry of distress diverted the guests, saddened by the temporary levelling, and permitted them to "treat themselves to a pint of good blood." One so loves to surpass one's neighbour in no matter what, whether it be only in the manner of chewing one's food.

At the end of the repast, Floritchica said:

"Now, Trasnila, we should very much like to hear a tzigane story. Do you know one?"

Trasnila, jovial and quite at his ease, responded:

"A tzigane story? I know one—my own—but I think it is rather too universal."

"Well, tell it to us."

"It is this, honoured boyars. You must not expect me to amuse you. Tziganes are often good for that. It is not so in my case. Nor my fault.

"The beginning of my tale makes me think of the famous Roumanian proverb: 'When a tzigane becomes emperor, he begins by having his father hanged.'

"Poor emperor! He should have had a father like mine. If I did not hang him, *deh*—it would not be because I did not want too. And as for the throne, I might have done without that!

"My father is a Roumanian boyar, over Calafat way. He still lives, fat and healthy. I am not the only one of his sons—there are a whole company of tziganes, boys and girls alike, who owe their lives to him, without having any reason for owing him eternal gratitude; for, like all the other lords, he did nothing but get with child the finest virgins of the tribes whose despot he was—a thing that the very dogs do with more honesty.

"I knew this of him, which my mother told me one rainy day: that he had inherited the fortune of his father while very young and hardly finished with his studies; that he had never wished to marry, 'because women deceive their husbands;' that he had returned from the land of Frantzouchkas⁴⁰ disgusted with perfumed women, and that he was wild about young tzigane girls.

"When I opened my eyes to the ignominy of our slavery, he was in the full strength of his age. A little later, toward my eighteenth year, I heard him cry, one day, as he pointed to a beautiful tzigane girl:

" 'Whoever touches Profiritza shall be beaten to death! She shall do no work, from this day!'

"Everybody knew what this meant. I had the courage to answer, then and there, as I removed my bonnet:

" 'Master! May the happy days of your lordship be as endless as the number of lovely girls whom you may have, but leave me Profiritza! She is mine, and wishes to have me!'

"This I uttered all in a breath, and instantly the entire tribe began to howl as they do at burials. The women tore their hair. The males spat with vexation.

" 'Ptiou, the stupid gipsy! He will be killed!'

"My father, the master, walked down the steps and demanded:

" 'Have you already touched Profiritza?'

" 'No.'

" 'That is fortunate for you!'

"Then, to the steward, he said:

" 'Give him fifty lashes.'

"Profiritza threw herself at his feet and entreated

⁴⁰ The French.

him, with all the tenderness of her fifteen years, to pardon me; but the heart of this father did not soften, and I got what was coming to me. I felt nothing, for my eyes could at least look into those of Profiritza all the time, and her eyes shot out fire.

"I was not to see her again for a long while. She was placed in the care of an old tzigane woman who tended the bodies of girls destined for the master's bed, while I, with ten other slaves, men and women, had to go away the next morning, under the escort of a ruffian armed with a whip. We were offered as *danie* to the Superior of a monastery far from Calafat, where we arrived after a week's march. They had separated husband from wife, mother from child, betrothed from betrothed, and were as cold to our cries and tears as one is cold to the bleatings of ewes separated from their lambs.

"Well, honoured boyars! Can you understand that, of all the evils which we suffered—whip, chain, iron horns, the rape of our women—these separations were the hardest for us?

"For ever cursed, from father to son and to their very graves, be the unholy ones who thus tortured us!

"For two years the monastery kept us under close guard. While working in the fields, it was impossible to go one step away, even to obey the call of nature, without being called after and beaten. Then, when it was seen that we of the new herd had forgotten our bereavements, we were given some liberty, like the others.

"But I—I had not forgotten my Profiritza! Day and night, I saw nothing but her. My breast burned, until I felt as if somebody were drawing a livid coal

across it. And so, one evening, I stole a horse from the stable and disappeared like a nalouscal.⁴¹

"I galloped on, without a halt, through wood and field, until morning, when the poor beast fell, never to rise again. I removed his halter, kissed his feet, and then set off running at full speed; but not far from there I was to get another lift. In a field, a fine herghelia⁴² were browsing, under guard of two tziganes, who were playing at knuckle-bones. I said to myself: 'So much the worse for them;' and, creeping up, I seized by the mane a mare which thought the devil had leaped upon her back and came near to killing me. The poor tziganes cried out:

" 'Stop! We shall be beaten to death!'

" 'Do as I do!' I cried out to them, riding off at full speed.

"That very evening I was prowling about in the neighbourhood of the master-cur's court. It was during the month of cherries. Profiritza knew that I always called her with the cuckoo cry. I twisted my tongue and made the cry several times. Long I waited in vain. Again I made the cry. There was no answer. 'She has forgotten me; she is having too good a time with the boyar!' I thought.

"My heart hurt me—hurt me mortally. Fatigue and hunger overcame me. I sank down, and let loose of the mare's bridle, 'Go to the devil!' I said.

"I thought of setting fire to the house, and then drowning myself in a well. And yet, God! how good it was to be alive! I was twenty years old, and I loved life, like all tziganes. Then, why should I be so quick to believe that my Profiritza was happy?

⁴¹ Vision.

⁴² A troop of shod horses.

"This comforting thought made my eyelids heavy, and I fell asleep in the field.

"I woke with great difficulty, my face bathed by the tears of my Profiritza. For a long time she had been weeping on my breast.

"Stupefied with sleep, I pressed her in my arms. She did not smell good. Then I felt her hands and feet. They were maimed.

" 'You are no longer with the boyar?' I asked her.

"The poor creature wailed:

" 'He sent me back to work, a month after your departure; but I do not complain of that. He crippled me . . . I suffer in my stomach. My hurts have stiffened me. I thought I was dying this very night. That is why I could not come out at once. And you? You have run away from the monastery. And the horns and the chain await you!'

"I did not answer. Sick, she was still more precious to me, and I could not have enough of holding her in my arms.

"Profiritza went away to get me some food. A hayrick sheltered us until the Pleiades leaned toward the west. Then, hand in hand, we made for the Danube. I found my mare on the road. She let me take her halter and rendered me a final service, for I gave her to the ferryman who took us across the river.

"We were now at Vidin, in Bulgarian country. Still in Turkey!

"When, by the full daylight, I saw the real aspect of my Profiritza, I was frightened. She was unrecognizable—lean, with sunken, feverish eyes, white lips, a dragging step, and half bent over. At every hundred steps she was obliged to sit down at the edge of the road.

"It was in one of these stops that we were seen and accosted by the Kehaia Leonti, the blackguard who was to make me more unhappy than ever.

"He was in a carriage. Beside him sat a young and lovely Bulgarian woman, who looked sad enough to break your heart. I at once perceived that he was a great man of Vidin, so I rose and uncovered. He stopped and beckoned me to approach. Old and with shifty eyes, his face corroded by the pox, he revolted me exceedingly.

" 'Who are you, and what are you doing here?' he demanded, in Turkish.

"He was right to ask me this. What could two tziganes seated on the side of a road be doing? Does one ever see donkeys or cows, moving here and there without masters? And when one sees them, one captures them, whether tziganes or cattle!

"That is what he did, when I had answered:

" 'We have been here since morning . . . My wife is sick.'

" 'Follow me, behind the carriage!' he cried, ill-naturedly.

"Again the carriage moved on. Following it, I said to Profiritza:

" 'I am afraid that we have now fallen from the lake into the well.'

"That was exactly what we had done. We found ourselves in the hands of a murderer. My father, the dog, made the young girls pregnant or sick, and then abandoned them. The Kehaia Leonti killed them, but by the hands of a stranger.

"A week passed. We knew not what our task would be, or our fate. When we arrived in the yard, the Kehaia had shown me a cabin:

" 'You will remain there. You will have no work,

for the moment—take care of your wife. Afterwards, you will do me a service, and then you may depart.’

‘I considered myself in luck, and kissed the hem of his robe. But during the following days we were astonished at the mournfulness of that court, where no slave ever sang or danced, and where all the servants moved past without ever exchanging a gay word.

“When the day of the ‘service’ arrived, merciful Lord! I was ready to faint, as strong a tzigane as you see I am!

“One evening he called me and, putting a purse and a silk rope in my hand, said:

“‘Behind that door is the young woman whom you saw in my carriage. I leave this evening and shall not return until tomorrow, at this same hour; and I wish then to find this woman dead. You will strangle her. If you do not . . . !’

“I heard no more. My head spun. I collapsed on the floor, and midnight found me stupefied, without a single thought. My first impulse was to get away, but there was not a door or a window open. Then I cried out:

“‘Mamouca-a-a! Why did you not miscarry? Poor me!—poor wretch!’

“I thrust the rope and the purse into my pockets, and gently opened the accursed door. I found myself in a great, sumptuously furnished room. On a divan lay the young Bulgarian girl. She leaped to her feet, as lovely as a very Cosinzeana,⁴³ and cried out, in Turkish:

“‘I love!’

“That word smote my heart more sorely than a poignard. I gazed at her neck, and thought: ‘You love,

⁴³ The beautiful heroine of Roumanian legend.

and yet I must strangle you!’ And with both hands I seized an iron from the hearth, and struck myself with all my strength, here, on the brow!

“Blood covered my features. The young girl approached, fell on her knees, and crossed her arms upon her breast. Then she went and threw herself on the divan, sobbing without ceasing, with one single word on her lips:

“‘Dmitri . . . Dmitri . . . Dmitri! . . .’

“I sat down at the entrance of the room, near the wide-open door; and it was there that I was found by the Kehaia Leonti.

“He came in, on tiptoe, and took one glance at the divan. The Bulgarian did not stir. She continued to lie face down, her head enveloped in a kerchief—perhaps asleep.

“I rose. The Kehaia fixed me with a gaze that seemed to say: ‘What, did she beat you before she died?’

“For sole answer, I dropped my head on my breast. But when he went to the divan and reached out his hand to see if I had done the ‘service’ which he had required, I gave him a blow with my fist on the top of his head that stretched him on the ground.

“That was all. And surely, he had got his deserts!

“In the darkness of night, I left the yard, the unconscious Bulgarian girl in my arms. Near the Danube, before we parted, she told us of her ardent love for her Dmitri, of her abduction, and her refusal to yield to the tyrant. She gave me, as a remembrance, this Constantinate. ⁴⁴

⁴⁴ A fetichistic piece of gold, bearing the images of the holy Emperor and Empress, Constantine and Helena.

"Then I again crossed the river with my Profritza, and for two years we lived in the forests.

"The gold of the Kehaia Leonti had served to buy me arms. I wished to become a haïdouc and to enter some band; but it was in vain that I reached the mountains to discover one. On the other hand, I had the misfortune to find myself presently face to face with a potera commanded by the nephew of the Superior of the monastery from which I had fled.

"We defended ourselves to the last discharge. Profritza was killed at my side. Riddled with wounds, I was taken back to the monastery, where, instead of hanging me as I expected, they put horns on my head and a chain on my ankle.

"It was in this condition that the domnitza Floritchica found me. She brought me here, and it is by her grace that I today sit at this table."

VII

WERE I a believer, I should say that God has placed grief at the very side of joy, the better to demonstrate to man the nothingness of life and to reconcile him with death. I often thought of this during the five years that I lived at Snagov. The depth of our bitterness we drank on the following occasion.

Shortly before capital punishment was abolished, the penalty claimed, but in quite different ways, two haïdouc chiefs—Jiano and Boujor—who were captured and condemned to be hanged at almost the same time.

Boujor, the son of a village priest, and a brave soul, courageously paid his debt to human ignominy. On the other hand, Jiano, the timid Jiano, the son of

a great boyar, flinched before the rope and went back to his kind, as, according to our proverb, the water which issues from a river must inevitably return to its bed.

The comedy was adroitly enacted, and the honour of this *haidouc* was preserved. You know that an ancient and revered Roumanian *datina* grants life and liberty to a person condemned to die if a virgin offers to wed him at the very moment when the brigand is about to expiate his crimes. A priest gave them his nuptial blessing at the foot of the gallows. The executioner was their sponsor.

The virgin who offered to wed Jiano was the maid of honour of a *domnita*—not that of Snagov, but a real one; the daughter of the prince who was reigning in Wallachia.

Thus Jiano could end his days, indulging his *haidouc* memories in a palace, going about in silken Turkish slippers and an embroidered shirt. It is not given to everybody to possess strong shoulders. And the Roumanian proverb also says that it costs much to preserve the fine skin of one's face.

These two losses, the one more devastating than the other, produced great dismay in the ranks of the *haidoucs*, especially as Boujor perished through betrayal. Confidence in Snagov diminished; our companions deeming it useless to go there by the four roads, to touch the heart of the boyars. Many of them deserted our two valiant friends, Groza and Codreano, forming robber bands, and pillaged the good and evil alike, whichever came first to hand.

Another circumstance which increased our discomfort was that our business of foreign merchandising suddenly took an unexpected turn: the new mode of

living which we had introduced threw on the streets entire artisan guilds, which for centuries had fashioned all that had been necessary to the old manner of life.

There arose, on this account, a grumble of wrath which soon mounted to threatening proportions. Mobs, armed with sticks, rushed through the streets of the towns, beating the Jews, who were considered responsible for the suppression of the artisan class, and breaking the windows of their stores. The authorities who, in consideration of heavy purses of gold, had given us a permit to engage in business, were declared anti-national. A number of high officials were forced to resign.

At the head of the malcontents was a certain Arghiropol, a Greek by origin, an anti-Semite by profession. He was supported by that new class of the vulgar rich, eager for domination, whom the people called *ciocoi*. These were mostly former servants of genuine boyars whom they had ruined.

The *ciocoi* were our most obstinate enemies, and their powerful solidarity soon impressed every one. The humiliation and scorn which they encountered everywhere forced them to unite against their former masters. The money at their command served for corruption, and penetrated all public functions. The danger deriving from this swarm of famished bedbugs was apparent to every one, but nothing could be done against them. A privileged class, heavy with blood and exploitation, was dying; another, still more degraded, equally hated and equally menaced was replacing it. We found ourselves between the two. Between the Arghiropols and the Daniel Crasnarus, there were few Roumanian Abbé Uhrichs left to aid us. Far, therefore, was the peasant from the day when he might say: "I

shall be happy at last!" And we, who struggled for the welfare of all the workers, assumed the aspect of traitorous patriots.

To be sure, progress had destroyed a number of the working trades; but can one conceive of anything more vile than the exploitation of this misfortune for the purpose of deriving personal profit? And who were they who had denounced us to the vindictiveness of the malcontents? Precisely the *ciocoi*, those rogues who had been the first to adopt the foreign usages which we were importing! For them, Snagov was a "nest of Freemasons," of creatures of the Jews. The rest they did not know about. Not yet!

They learned it soon enough, thanks to the suspicions awakened by Trasnila's tale.

One autumn evening, in the year 1858, Florit-chica was giving a dinner in honour of France, which was represented by its Consul and the Abbé Uhrich. Great events had taken place shortly before, and the influence of France had caused our rights to prevail.

The elections of the two Divans, which were empowered to choose a Prince, to be the same for both countries, occurred under unusually scandalous conditions. Arghiropol, who had become commandant of the Wallachian militia, and Daniel Crasnaru, the great Moldavian plotter, did their utmost to exclude the partisans of the Union. The travesty of "national opinion" which resulted from these elections incensed Colonel Couza. The day following this "consultation," he resigned his office, with a great slamming of doors. The French representative at Bucharest, as well as the Abbé Uhrich and Hood Bey, determined to denounce the plot to the Western powers. Napoleon vigorously intervened at Constantinople, threatened to recall his

ambassador, and obtained the annulment by the Porte of this Tsarist victory.

The results of the new elections were acceptable, and one might expect of their choice the realization of that national hope, the union of the principalities. That was likewise the promise of France. And on that very evening, the personalities of the numerous candidates to the throne were being passed in review.

We were sitting over our coffee, when the Hetman Miron and Floritchica perceived a stranger who, mingling with the chatting crowd, seemed to be listening attentively to the talk. No one could say who had admitted him. He had come after dinner, profiting by that Roumanian hospitality which opens the doors to whoever wishes to enter. His *ciocoi* gait, his Grecian moustaches, and his impertinence unmistakably betrayed one of those spies whom Arghiropol often sent to our gatherings; but this person seemed to be a personage of some importance, for he boldly approached the intimate circle where the mistress of the house and her French guests were discussing the affairs of the day. He was a man of ripe age, had a dark brown complexion, and was quite correctly garbed in the European style. The stranger prowled round our group, nervously picking his tufted "patch," which he wore in the manner of most Greeks of the period.

No one expected him to address us, but, at a question put by the Moldavian hetman concerning the certain candidacy of Couza, he cried out, in a firm voice:

"Who is this Couza, anyway? Probably he is another one of those *haïdouc* assassins!"

The consternation aroused by this remark rendered us mute for as long a time as it took Floritchica

to restrain Miron from words of violence. The Abbé Uhrich, ever conciliatory, hastened to answer:

"My word, sir, in this country of official assassins, I do not think that the haïdoucs are by any means the most sanguinary!"

"Who are you, if you please?" the mistress demanded.

"I am Theophilos Kiriak, captain of the poteri."

"And what have you to do with us here?"

"Nothing—for the moment—madame!"

"And later?"

"We shall see!"

Smiling cynically, the captain of the poteri withdrew, and disappeared among the throng. At the same instant, Floritchica was called outside by Trasnila. I accompanied her:

The tzigane's face was as dark as the night, and his eyes were bulging out of their sockets.

"Domnitza, I have seen, here, the man who arrested me. The fellow with the patch-beard!"

"The nephew of the Superior of Orbou?"

"Himself! And he saw me, when he entered!"

"Did he recognize you?"

"He certainly did! He even said to me: 'Ah, you are here? I have been looking for you for a long time!'"

Floritchica seized my arm:

"Quick! Send five men on horseback, with Ely leading them, over the Bucharest road. The same number, with Spilca and Movila, by the Ploesti road. If he is alone, or with only one other person, grill that 'patch.' But if there are a large number . . . so much the worse! We shall see . . . In any case, our companions will not have to watch later than midnight. And

remove all surveillance in the court, after the guests are gone."

Several minutes later, the order was executed, and I resumed my place beside the abbé, who pleased me greatly.

Kiriatic, one hand in his pocket, was smoking and watching a card game. Twice, he bet a louis, and won. It was obvious that nobody knew him. I wished to observe the moment of his departure. The rogue disappeared into the night, unperceived.

Toward ten o'clock the house was empty, all the lights out, and every one asleep. In autumn we had no guests to house.

And now, on the balcony illuminated by a sickly moon, Floritchica and I were awaiting the return of the haïdoucs. She was moody, like those bare trees that anticipate the rigours of the approaching winter.

"Are you afraid that we are betrayed, if Kiriatic escapes?" I asked her.

"Betrayed—that we are already. And we shall be still more so, whether he escapes or not, in the measure that we act!"

Floritchica spoke in the voice of a frustrated person, which astonished me, for I knew her to have sufficient courage for any emergency. I wished to know more.

"And then?"

"And then . . . we shall see! We shall end like haïdoucs. Of that I have not the slightest doubt. Sooner or later, we shall meet our doom. We shall be taken and condemned. But at least, I should like first to see the Union effected, and, if possible, with Couza on the throne. It would be a great step forward. I have faith in that man's heart. Of course, he will not be able to

do all that he would wish, but which of us can fully realize his dream? A man's life can just about prevail to overturn a cart of clay. For the rest, it is time that is the great artificer. Little by little, while killing men, it ameliorates life. It does so a little more quickly if men aid it. We aid it, and that is all that we owe to life. But that much we owe it. Every man owes that much!"

I contemplated this singular mother, whom I loved for her valour and her youth (for she was still youthful at thirty-eight), and I said to myself: "She is concealing something from me."

I ventured:

"It is said that you are ambitious to become the wife of a Miron . . . a prime minister. Is that true?"

Her face remained impassive:

"No, Jeremy, it is not true. My ambition is much more lofty than that of being the wife of any one. I was born generous, which means that the suffering of my neighbour reverberates in my heart with such violence that it is possible for me to be happy only when I am doing good. My eyes are filled with the animal misery of the people, who are good like all that is of the folk, and it makes me suffer as if this misery had denied me the air to breathe. That is why, from the day when I felt within myself the strength to make game of the tyranny of the powerful, I risked my well-being and my very life to satisfy this need of my heart—to relieve my neighbour of a portion of his pain.

"If only every person could feel the delight of such an ambition! Then life, which on its own account is rich enough in suffering, would at least be free of the horrible contribution of human selfishness."

Floritchica ceased speaking, and fixed her gaze

at a certain point in the forest. The heavens were free of clouds; one could count the trees as though in broad daylight, and we perceived from afar a man in whom we soon recognized Trasnila. He was bearing something on one shoulder—a kind of bundle. It was, in fact, a bundle of four rifles.

“Did you send him anywhere?” Floritchica asked me.

“No. Where the devil does he come from, at this hour?”

Entering the courtyard, the tzigane saw us on the balcony, and at once cried out:

“Domnitza, it is done. I have myself grilled that ‘patch.’ There were two of them.”

“Who? Where? How?”

“Why, the captain of the poteri! You had ordered it. And since the roads toward Bucharest and Ploesti were guarded, I hid myself, ready for anything, on the tiny road that goes to Caldarushani, to the monastery—those curs love monasteries! And then he passed, with his adjutant, both on horseback, without suspecting anything. From my ditch I raised one gun after the other—bang! bang! The horses took to flight. The cavaliers were not dead, and I had to use my feet a little on their necks. . . .”

Toward one o’clock in the morning Ely and Spilca returned with their men, all morose of mien. Making for the stable, the two chiefs growled in turn:

“The villain did not travel by our road!”

Floritchica, quite abstracted, did not answer them. But she said to me, as she took herself off to bed:

“And now, we shall see, as the other one said!”

VIII

IN January 1859 occurred the election of the princes of the two Danubian principalities. The excitement was at its height, from one end to the other of the Roumanian countries. It was equally so in the house of the haïdoucs, but there the cause was twofold, for to the legitimate emotion which this great event aroused was added alarm over the judicial investigations undertaken by the Bucharest authorities for the purpose of discovering the assassins of the two *poteri* killed by Trasnila. The instigator of this inquest, we had no doubt, was Arghiropol, who had been a friend of the late captain of the *poteri*.

Every evidence of the haïdouc at Snagov was carefully effaced, the morning after the murder: the arms were buried, and most of the men had disappeared. To the police who came to examine the house, Floritchica displayed her model upper-bourgeois home.

There the affair paused, menacingly. Though slightly impeded by the fever of the elections, it could recover its vigour and ruin us, thanks to the corrupting methods employed by Arghiropol to loosen the tongue of some *tzigane* servant.

"Come what may," Floarea Codrilor said, "our duty is to go on, to the very end!"

This "end" was the election of Couza. But to be elected, he had first to file a declaration of his candidacy to the throne; and this moody creature of a colonel chose instead to lock himself up in his home, without giving any signs of life. We waited, in the first week of January, for the arrival of the Hetman Miron,

his intimate friend, who was to bring us his decisive answer.

The indefatigable Abbé Uhrich, who, two months earlier, had left for Paris with a special report from the French Consul on the situation in the principalities, had returned and was with us when Miron, half-frozen, suddenly made his appearance.

"Well, is it all arranged?" Floritchica demanded, at once.

"It is not all arranged, by any means!" the hetman answered, as he removed the icicles hanging from his moustaches. "He says that the throne does not interest him at all; that it is not in his character to join a flock of ravens fighting over a corpse, and that it is useless for us to insist. There you are! I spent the whole night trying to shake him out of his obstinacy. All for nothing!"

For a moment nonplussed, Floritchica watched our friend throw himself, exhausted with fatigue, on a divan. Then she broke out:

"We must shatter this obstinacy! Nobody has the right to be lazy, when the world suffers. The refusal of Couza makes me ashamed in the presence of the Abbé Uhrich, who has just come from his own country, armed with everything necessary for us to succeed. What? He realizes that what the ravens are devouring is the corpse of his nation, and that leaves him cold?"

Turning to the abbé, she seized his hand, and said, entreatingly:

"Father, would you give the Roumanian people a last proof of your affection?"

The good man smiled, and lowered his eyes:

"Speak, my daughter!"

"Well, in two hours we take the road to Galatz,

to convince Couza of his duty; and I am thinking of the inestimable aid which we should have in your presence, weighty with authority and rich in documents."

"I shall accompany you, and all the more willingly since I must go to Jassy on a mission."

After the midday repast two sleighs took the four of us through the same whirlwind of snow.

That journey of five days, in the midst of winter, often made me think of the curse which is the life of men and beasts, equally oppressed by those whom fate favours. Truly, it is no matter for rejoicing to have come into the world with a compassionate heart!

Nature, having no conscience, is indifferent to grief. Mankind, supposedly not deprived of it, is equally indifferent. Seized between these two indifferences, the unfortunate blasphemes against the authors of his life and against his Creator.

Through immense spaces of country, levelled by the snow, desolated by the blast, forgotten by God, I have seen this unfortunate; we have entered his hut, and have wept over him, the while his own eyes were dry. He knows that, night after night, his cabin is buried beneath the blight of nature's indifference. He knows that, in daytime, man's indifference leaves him so buried, in company with his dear ones. Then he has the prudence to lock himself in at night with his spade. In the morning he opens the door of his tomb and commences to dig a hole, a tunnel, in the spotless hill which overwhelms him with its cold generosity; and there is the man of all the ages emerging at the other side of the hill, like a mole, a two-footed mole, who leans upon his spade, inhales the pure air, and contemplates the white cemetery of his black existence.

Mute, the human mole then moves toward the

tomb of those which nourish him: his cow, his ox, his horse, a ewe. There, it is worse: through the holes in the roof, the snow has filled the so-called stable. The peasant spits into his hands and disinters his treasure: phantom beasts, skin and bone, and the skin pierced by the bones, with eyes dimmed.

At the stroke of his spade they rise, the snow on their backs; they tremble and collapse. The manger is wasted and daily diminishes: it is true that it has no utility.

The helot of the Roumanian boyar carries in an armful of maize stalks, throws them down in front of the snouts of the martyred animals, then regains his lair, makes a fire of dung, and reflects upon the great pity of the Omnipotent.

He is not too gloomy of temper, and if you enter his home with bread, some brandy, and tobacco, he begins at once to tell you a little tale of this sort, for example:

"There was once a poor man who was overwhelmed with children, like myself. One day, his wife favoured him with a new child. He did not know to whom to go to have it baptized, so he took the baby and went down a forest path, to seek him a rich godparent. Death advanced in front of him, enveloped in her white draperies, scythe in hand. She said to him:

" 'Let me baptize this child, then I will make you rich.'

" 'Very well, godmother, here it is.'

"Death baptized it, and said to the man:

" 'Now, listen! I will strike down the richest lords of the land with grievous maladies. No medicine will cure them. You will tell them that, in less than two days, your incantations will put them on their feet if

they will pay you certain sums: demand a great deal! When you get into the room of the sick person, you will see me present. Murmur some incomprehensible words. I will depart; the rich man will instantly arise. You will become famous, and extremely rich. But—for there is a ‘but’—if, on entering the sick room, you see me holding on to the patient’s feet, you may know that the man is yours, that you can save him. If, on the contrary, you see me installed at his head, that means that he is mine, that he must die. Promise nothing then, and go away. Do as I bid, and you will make your fortune within a few days.’

“The man did as Death had counselled, and in less than a year he became as rich as the Prince, with lands, cattle, serfs, and carriages, until he could not count their number. The godmother took her position at the foot of the sick ones, until she judged that her colleague was sufficiently rich; then, one day, she installed herself at the head of a dying man. It happened to be an old boyar, who had promised to whoever should cure him the half of his fortune. The newly-rich man saw Death at the head of his best client, and made a grimace:

“‘Yield me, Mother Death, this man, the last, and I shall have had enough,’ he murmured, in a low voice.

“‘Impossible!’ declared Death, with a shake of the head.

“The man was annoyed by this refusal, thought an instant, and ordered the servants:

“‘Lift the bed, with the sick man in it, and turn the foot to the place where the head now is.’

“Death understood the farce that her ward was playing on her. Since she is not rancorous, she yielded

to him the last sick person; but she left, thinking: 'It is in vain that one tries to do good to the poor world. Man never has enough!'

We found Colonel Couza in his chimney corner, cleaning a hunting-rifle. At our entrance, a huge greyhound barked, in a friendly way.

Floritchica embraced the old comrade of her pleasures and hopes.

"So that is how a haïdouc of your dimensions abdicates!"

The dimensions of the haïdouc colonel were, in fact, most respectable; but Floritchica referred rather to the dimensions of his soul—and these, as stamped on the serene visage of Couza, his limpid eyes, his penetrating gaze, further impressed me. His was a strong soul, tragically united to a quivering heart—the heart of the passionate. Energy, love, weakness, goodness; all this was imprinted on his mouth, the lips of which were somewhat full and adorned with an honest moustache that merged into a thick Vandyke beard.

Couza did not answer his friend's apostrophe. He helped us to remove our furs, ordered tea, and violently rubbed the ears of the Abbé Uhrich, which were slightly white.

"It is madness to come from Bucharest to Galatz, in such weather," he said, resuming his place by the fire and starting to clean his gun again. "And then, you come inopportunist. Tomorrow, at dawn, I leave on a bear hunt. You will be alone for four days."

"You may even go hunting crocodiles," the domnitza of Snagov replied, "if you but first give us your petition of candidacy to the throne—and let us lose no time about it!"

The deceptive calm of the colonel vanished. His eyes blazed, his voice thundered:

"I, in the fair of the executioners? I, dispute with them for the throne? Never! It seems to me that I did wrong in permitting myself to become a prefect and an officer. Enough of that! The lust to reign, which has already cost the Couza family one head, is too much outside the life which pleases me for me now to risk my head. . . ."

"The life that pleases you!"

Floritchica turned to the Abbé Uhrich.

"Do not take him at his word, abbé. You will know, better than any one else, how to excuse a generous soul for its moment of selfishness! He is surely expected to breakfast tomorrow by some beautiful woman. Let us give him the four days he asks of us, in order to hunt his . . . boars!"

Then, returning to Couza, who had turned his back on us in order to laugh unperceived, she added:

"See, Alexander! Admit that your bad humour is due to the fact that we bounded in on you at the very moment when you were getting ready for some escapade!"

"I will admit anything that you wish and all that would delight my enemies, but I persist in my refusal to scoundrelize myself with the rogues who make a weather vane of their prince! Reflect a little! If I were to be elected, my first act would be to return to the peasant his land, and to hunt out the satyr monks from the monasteries, after having secularized the domains which they have stolen from the nation. Well, then! Can one do that, against the yelping of the young and old? . . . For there is no use in deceiving ourselves! Our young 'idealists' conceal, under their mask of

liberalism, the same thirst for power and the same greed, identical with that of their parents. It is not for nothing that the people say that 'Whatever is born of a cat, eats mice.' No! I am not of that kind. Only so long as one remains a simple citizen can he follow goodness and justice. Power disfigures the noblest characters. . . ."

"Leave this display of Christian virtue aside, for the time being," Floritchica cried. "Today we know that goodness and justice, in order to force man to be better, needs power. They must be imposed upon the predominant human wickedness. And precisely for this reason the good must enter the lists and dispute the power with the evil. Every just and generous man has the right to cry out boldly: 'I must have part of the power!' He need not blush for this, for he is disinterested. It is the only resource that remains to the true idealists, if they wish to lead the world to the realm of goodness and justice. We need not take account of the way in which human nature is formed—God has created as He chose, and it is for us to do what is right for us. And if God remains indifferent to the blood shed on the earth, we cannot imitate Him, for we are sickened at the spectacle."

"But what can we do, a handful of disinterested men, against a world of hate?" Couza exclaimed.

"Much, my friend!" the Abbé Uhrich interrupted. "The Son of Man Himself was alone, in the beginning. And assuredly, even though He was not able to change the face of this world, His faith has proved how greatly the human soul was athirst for an ideal. It has always been so, and will always remain so. And all the religious have demonstrated this desire of purity. That is what concerns us: to know that each breath of good-

ness which traverses this selfish humanity, touches it in spite of all, ennobles, and advances it. Would you have a little example? It regards you quite closely—it concerns your refusal to recognize the validity of those elections which you were ordered to supervise. Well, then, your resignation, so courageously motivated, permitted France and England to foil a Tsarist plot which, had it not been for your gesture, would have been able to maintain much longer yet the evil Russian domination over the principalities! Is that not a fine thing for one man to have effected? And it is not all. The reverberations of your noble revolt have penetrated the very hearts of the people. I have spoken of you with many Moldavian peasants. They have said to me: ‘Our Couza! He is a *haidouc*!’

“Now I come to the principal point of my mission. Your *haidouc* act at this time pleases France, which sees in you a strong arm against the Russian pretensions upon Constantinople. She is officially ready to sustain your candidacy to the throne and, once you are elected, to have you recognized by the Porte. I have acquainted the members of the Wallachian Divan with this news. They pretended not to know you. Tomorrow I leave on the same mission to Jassy.

“Here are two letters from your friends, Lamartine and Edgar Quinet. Read them, my son, and let yourself be borne to your place—the place of historic duty!”

Early the next day, for he had asked a night in which to reflect, Couza came to join us at the tea which preceded everybody’s departure. He was in hunting-costume and held a paper in his gloved hand. Ah, the fine, proud breast, on which the Roumanian people shortly afterwards was to pin the most worthy of all

medals, that of its never-to-be-forgotten gratitude toward the only prince who knew how to remain haïdouc to the end!

Handing the paper to the Hetman Miron, he said, with conviction:

"You have my candidacy, but I shall solicit the support of no one, and I reserve the right to resign if I am chosen by only one of the two principalities."

An hour later, three sleighs set out in three different directions—Couza went to the hunt; the Abbé Uhrich and Miron flew to Jassy with the petition of candidacy; Floritchica and I returned to Snagov, to exert the last shoulder-thrust against the tenacity of the Wallachian boyars.

At the moment of departing, Floarea Codrilor cried out to Couza:

"Alexander, watch the boars that you are going to hunt! They have powerful defences, and they might wound you mortally!"

IX

DURING the night halt which we made at Buzeu, half-way between Galatz and Snagov, Floritchica wrote this note to our friends Groza and Codreano:

"Come down as quickly as possible. C—— has filed his candidacy, and we must employ extreme methods to secure his election in both countries. For this purpose I shall assemble most of the boyar electors at Snagov. Come and throw some terror into their bones!

"Floarea Codrilor."

Movila the vataf, who was the chief of our guard during this journey, departed in all haste to deliver the missive to Father Manole, one of our most faithful intermediaries and the haïdouc innkeeper who had provisioned us during our winter sojourn in the Dark Valley. Near the village of Lopatari, at the very foot of the huge Bouzoian Mountains, he kept one of those carcuma in which the shepherd, the thief, and the haïdouc rub shoulders without ever asking questions of one another.

Father Manole and his son were our couriers, and could tell, day and night, the place where our companions could be found; but they would have allowed themselves to be cut into bits rather than divulge this information. Of course, this fidelity, though sincere, was none the less paid for. Yet we did not forget that the hostile authorities might pay even more liberally. If we ever forgot that fact, they promptly proceeded to recall it to us, as happened on the very day of our return to Snagov, when we learned that two haïdoucs, and not the least enthusiastic, had disappeared during our absence.

This disagreeable news threw us into consternation. It must truly be that man is far more insensate than the animal, to flounder so, after having given proof, through many long years, of his capacity for abnegation.

Floritchica berated them:

"The wretches! What did they lack here? And where will they find more affection? Let us hope that our friends come here very soon, and that there be many of them!"

The two captains came quickly enough, on a night

of sudden thaw and frightful mud; but the number of their men barely reached forty fighters.

They bore pitiful faces. Since the cessation of our connections, nearly two years before, the haïdoucs, obliged to behave, had been passing the six months of winter under the ground, in damp, unhealthy hroubas, where men and beasts warmed each other with the heat emanating from their bodies.

Groza, particularly, had a swollen face and distended knees. Yet his valour remained the same, and he suffered without complaining. To the supplications of his childhood friend, who implored him to seek medical care, he answered:

"Bah, it is not worth the trouble! Today or to-morrow, in one way or another, I shall be cured by the physician who rids us of all our pains without using emetics. But upon that day, at least, I shall have nothing to regret. I shall have lived in my fashion, doing much good and much evil, the one and the other in their due season. The offspring of the boyar will pronounce my name with terror to the ninth generation, while the peasant, perhaps, will go and lift a prayer to his hateful and indifferent God for the peace of my soul."

The treachery of the two haïdoucs, who had been bought by Arghiropol, surprised him not at all.

"We must reckon with them, too. The most verdant forest is never without dry branches. But if they fall into your hands, be pitiless! Flay them alive! There is nothing more vile than a treacherous haïdouc—not even a boyar!"

"And you, my good Joakime?" cried Floritchica, embracing the cantor and giving him two warm kisses on the cheeks. "You seem somewhat sad! Are you un-

happy? And why, by the Lord, should you be so? We are far from the evil times when the boyars demanded angelic songs of you, overwhelmed you with cold jewels, and refused you the earthy loves of which you were deprived. Have you not since made up for it? Have you not yet encountered the little lass who will permit you to kiss the hard apples of her breast? Speak, good Joakime, lover mine! Do you remember how, when I was barely fifteen, I let you touch my bosom?"

The old cantor began to cry. His bluish nose was running; his face sagged, and his unhappy eyes stared out of their sockets.

"No, Floritchica, no!" he stammered. "Nothing of the sort has happened! I am today the same as when my mother gave me birth. Every insect meets its companion, and together they know life. But I—I have never met mine! I live like a pig that has been castrated at six weeks. I have lived, have aged, and shall die like that castrated pig. The haïdouc life itself refused me what God has not wished to let me enjoy!"

Joakime lifted his arms:

"But, O Lord, You who are in the hearts of all creatures, You know that I have never thought of seizing by force, or of purchasing with jewels, what You have seen fit to refuse me. And, although a haïdouc outlaw, I have never raised a hand against a woman lost in the codrou, and have never touched a trigger to fell any of Your creatures. Thus You have willed it. Your will be done, Lord, but I suffer greatly to have missed all my life that which You permit to the most miserable of Your insects!"

The lamentations of Joakime, the sickness of Groza, the sadness that overwhelmed Codreano him-

self and the whole troop of haïdoucs, gave us an intimation of the fact that every human activity one day draws to its close. And, outside, it was as it was in our souls—a forest of dark branches, dank and bare and dripping; a heavy, lowering sky . . . and thousands of ravens. . . .

Oh, the vanity of our enthusiasm!

The same confusion reigned in the hearts of the political men, friends and enemies, harassed and bewildered by the throng of candidates, a dozen princes of all sorts, of boyars bursting with fat—all ready to sell their souls to the devil for six months of omnipotence. The union of the principalities concerned them so little that they would voluntarily have agreed to the dismemberment of their country into twelve, twenty-four, or thirty-six pieces, provided that each one among them might secure himself upon a petty throne!

Happily, the foreigner's interest—particularly, that of Napoleon III—did not harmonize with the desire of the princely wolf-pack. It must also be admitted that, as with every human thing, there existed, in the two electoral assemblies, a handful of frankly disinterested and sincerely patriotic boyars. They knew what they wanted and stuck to it, while the others changed their opinions according to the arguments of the partisans who besieged them. I saw them, all kinds of them, at that great gathering which was the decisive and the last one to take place in the Snagov house. It took place two days after the arrival of the haïdoucs who were called to the succour of our common cause.

The debates and the exhortations lasted until midnight. The name of Couza was repeatedly rejected, with the same arguments, by the majority of the hesitant electors.

"We do not know him. We have never seen him. We do not know what he is capable of doing. And then, they say that he is inclined to be volatile, somewhat peremptory, and even brutal toward those of us who possess great estates. . . . He seems to be capable of disregarding our rights and robbing us of our wealth. . . . That is not what we want. . . . We must proceed gradually."

As our most staunch supporters, the Abbé Uhrich and the Hetman Miron, were at Jassy, Floritchica exhausted herself in refutation of the stubborn malevolence of these boyars, who wished only one thing: to maintain their privileges, at whatever cost. She was as good as an angel that evening—not a single harsh word, no hint of vexation escaped her; only prayers, only supplications:

"You must exhibit a little goodwill on this historic occasion! Profit by the generous aid which comes to us from outside, and be equal to your tasks! The independence and the future of the principalities depend on the decision that you will make this week. And Couza is the only man capable, at this moment, of suppressing all quarrels, of rising above all ambitions and personal interests, in order to create the United Roumania of tomorrow. Nor fear that he will dispossess you—he is himself a boyar and a proprietor.

"Certainly, it will be necessary to make sacrifices. But do not forget that the bit of ground which you will part with is owing to the helot. In returning it to him, you manifest only the most elementary justice—the peasant also has the right to possess a fatherland!"

Embarrassed in their impotence to find an honest argument, the boyars passed from the most vapid verbiage to a sullen silence.

Thus midnight found us.

At that instant, the sound of a familiar bell and the sudden halt of a horse informed us that the special courier from Jassy had arrived.

Everybody rose. A young, intelligent-looking peasant appeared, a sealed letter in his hand. He lifted his bonnet and cried out, in a frenzy of enthusiasm:

“Long live Couza! Long live Moldavia!”

Floritchica burst into tears, clasped the peasant in her arms, and, opening the letter, read, sobbing, the following words:

ALEXANDER JOHN THE FIRST COUZA
Prince of Moldavia

By Unanimous Vote—January 17, 1859

MIRON

She had hardly finished reading, and our friends and a part of the undecided boyars were throwing themselves into each others' arms, when the great door was opened violently to the pounding of two arrivals. Trasnila roared:

“Groza! Codreano! The haïdoucs!”

The outlaw band, led by their two chiefs, rushed into the midst of the assembly, amid general consternation. We ourselves were surprised, the exploit being neither foreseen nor opportune. Forty throats cried out:

“Long live Alexander John Couza, Prince of the Roumania of tomorrow.”

Groza, letting his fiery eyes wander over the room, slowly pronounced these words:

“And also, long live the Wallachian boyars who in turn will elect Couza! And a curse on those who do

not elect him. A curse upon their children! Fire and sword will quickly avenge us!"

Friends and enemies, thinking themselves the victims of a nightmare, turned their backs in silence and ran out to their horses and carriages. The damp night engulfed them and their thoughts.

What would they do? Would they elect Couza?

We were not to know the result until a week later, and alas! under what conditions!

X

DELIGHTED, Floritchica paced from end to end of the tobacco-reeking room, kissing Miron's letter and repeating:

"He is elected!⁴⁵ At last, he is elected! Jassy has done its duty! Bucharest will follow the example of the Moldavians! There can be no doubt of that . . . but . . ."

She wrung her hands and gazed into space:

"By all the saints of heaven! If the Wallachians prove themselves brutes, then . . . you said well, Groza . . . a curse on them! I will sell all; I will sell

⁴⁵ I find an echo of the facts related here in the *History of the Roumanians and Their Civilization*, by M. N. Iorga (French edition, Bucharest, 1922). Here it is, as the document reads:

" . . . All those who were incapable of recognizing the higher force that sometimes intervenes to direct the actions of men above their own intentions must have been greatly astonished when, the day following his entry as a candidate, he was unanimously elected prince, on January 17, 1859. They would have been even more surprised to be told that this new Moldavian prince, unknown at Bucharest, would be able to vanquish the most powerful candidates who were disputing for victory. Yet, on January 24 (old style), he was proclaimed with the same unanimity in that other electoral assembly.

"Without hesitating further, Couza accepted."

myself, and we will find the necessary thousand guns to drown with blood, in one night, the stubbornness of those who deem nothing sacred, at any moment of their lives!"

We were but seven: she, Groza, Codreano, Ely, Spilca, Movila, and myself. The band, after having relieved the sentinels, had gone to bed.

No one spoke, and surely we were not thinking either, for we were all shaken by this sudden question of Ely:

"Can you tell me what we are doing here now?"

We gazed at each other, surprised and aroused. Ely developed his idea:

"Yes, what are we waiting for *now*? Couza will mount his throne. My boyar friends will take their places. And we, the haïdoucs—are they reserving positions as sub-prefects for us? Is it not rather a haïdouc Passion Week that awaits us? And in that case, what would you say of a legion of the Friends of Saint Peter, that would disown us more than three times, hand on heart, before the 'popular justice' of a jury of twelve ciocoi?"

"For my part, I prefer not to put to the proof the friendship of these fine boyars. The man of the law to his law; the haïdouc to his codrou. I am going to get my things!"

"I think we must do the same," said Groza.

And, addressing himself to Floritchica:

"Unless Floarea Codrilor knows herself to be protected by the domnitza of Snagov. . . ."

Groza's irony touched a raw wound.

"No, friend. . . . Do not doubt my absolute sincerity. At Snagov, as in the codrou, I have always been what you know me to be—a haïdouc. And if, some

day, we should have to be tried before that 'popular justice' of which Ely speaks, you will see that Floarea Codrilor and the domnitza of Snagov will make a common attack on human iniquity, and that this enemy will be no more protected than Trasnila by the assizes of the ciocoi.

"To serve the peasant, I am resigned to do what time permits me to do; but my spirit moves faster than my time. If I have preferred the diplomatic haïdouc work to that of the codrou, it is because I have seen that the latter brought the slaves only more torture and violence at the hands of the poteri.

"As for the sincerity of our boyar friends, do not expect them to be more virtuous than Saint Peter. They will disown us to the end, for the men of any epoch think that those are mad who move faster than their time. But not for that will I put on mourning-weeds. So much the worse for my time. The truth is in my heart!"

Groza went up to his friend and took her hands.

"Pardon me, Floritchica! I did not wish to be rude with you. . . ."

"It is not necessary, friend. Everything sincere is more sacred than what is divine! The gods change every thousand years, and from one nation to another: sincerity speaks in the same tongue to men of every land, and has had but one tongue since the beginning of the world!"

It was perhaps three o'clock in the morning, when a sentinel entered and said to us:

"Do you know what is happening outside? Well, then, open the window!"

Floritchica quickly did so. A whirl of cold mist invaded the room. Fog!

"It is thick enough to cut with a knife," the man said. "One cannot see three feet before him. We bump against the trees. What is worse, we betray our presence a league away, for it makes us cough like donkeys."

"Well, if you cough," Groza said, "the enemy will have to cough as well, and he will betray himself in turn, unless he has a sun stuffed in his shirt."

"Yes, but while we are coughing, they can spit grape shot right in our faces!" the haïdouc growled.

"You are right. Call the men and take up a position behind the windows of the gallery. Perhaps the dawn will drive the fog away, and then we shall leave."

The sentinels were recalled. Only Trasnila wished to be left to prowl round the house. His arms swinging like dangling posts, he came to tell us:

"I have bad signs. For two days my ears have been cheeping, and my left eye twitches—twitches until I am sick. I believe that our hour is soon to come. . . . My heart tells me so. During your absence, persons, always the same persons, passed and repassed, examining the place as if they wished to buy it. Ely saw them, too. Everybody has seen them. What can we do? Now they know us; they know who we are. This night I cried out to them, right in their faces: 'Groza! Codreano! The haïdoucs!' Is that not enough?"

It was enough, as we all knew; and we had no intention of wasting time talking about it.

What we did not know, nor Trasnila either, was that Arghiropol, at the head of a veritable army, was already near by.

He was at Caldarushani long before midnight; and, profiting by this for him auspicious fog, he had

surrounded us from a distance, advancing by degrees, without coughing or sneezing. Or if his men made a sound, we heard it only too late, when every point of escape was closed.

The encirclement was first betrayed by the muffled sound of horses' hoofs on the soaked ground. We instantly rushed to our guns: forty men from the mountain, and in addition, forty more cunning tziganes—that made, in all, eighty pairs of arms that had something to defend—something like liberty, for example, only blessed liberty! Alecaki, Marinoula, Evghenie, and a dozen of the tzigane servants held themselves in readiness to reload our extra guns in the only room that we left lighted—a sort of redoubt.

“You, Joakime,” said Floritchica to the cantor, “you shall sing psalms! You shall be the psalmist of our last night at Snagov! Sing, my fine fellow—that will be worth more than a gun! And watch out for bullets!”

Shortly afterwards, in the opaque mist that clung to the windows like wadding, we heard the whinnies of horses and the voices of men who were no longer taking the precaution of talking in low tones. The cordon of militia was probably at a distance of a hundred yards, and it took the form of a horse-shoe. The house was situated at the top of a sharp slope that descended directly to the pond. Only that side was free; but how were we to get the horses out without being heard? The ring encircled us so securely that to attempt to escape by leading the horses by the reins like the blind would have delivered us to certain slaughter.

“There must be four hundred of them!” said Groza, after taking a turn outside.

"And they are not mercenary *poteri*," Floritchica answered, "but militia men—Roumanian soldiers. How sad it is! I could wish to fall first in this massacre!"

"There will be no massacre and no one will fall, for it is I who command, by the grace of the fog!"

This response, coming from the midst of the darkness, was Joakime's. The crowd of *haïdoucs* scattered through the rooms and ready to open fire on their assailants, silently awaited an explanation from the invisible cantor. The flame of a taper wavered. Joakime seemed to be disguised as a priest, with a threadbare cassock, a stole on his breast, and a dirty potcape on his head.

We thought that he had gone mad. He stopped and scrutinized us with his kindly face:

"No! No massacre! Now, listen! Your horses are all there, behind this door. They are waiting to be received into your expensively carpeted rooms, as formerly the great boyars and the diplomats were received. Have them cross these fine rooms, and lead them through the door that opens on the slope toward the pool; mount them, and swim them across the water toward safety, toward the Eternal who does not desire your ruin!"

At this moment, a deafening uproar arose outside. Amid the bleating of lambs and the bawling of calves and cattle, the gipsy servants—about fifty men, women, and children—howled as only *tziganes* can howl:

"Fire! Fire! Help! The house is on fire!"

"Did you start the fire, Joakime?" Floritchica demanded.

"I fired the servants' houses, in order to provoke noise and confusion. But, for the love of God, profit

by it! To your horses! Quickly! They are already in the courtyard!"

"And you?"

"I am going to . . ."

The end of his sentence could not be heard. Loud hissing sounds pierced our ears; terrifying volleys broke the windows into splinters. In the brief silence which intervened before the second discharge, the voice of Arghiropol boomed out:

"They have set fire to the house by strategem! See to the pond! Fire on them!"

Again the hissing sound, and our house received a second volley.

Cries in the darkness of the rooms informed us that some of our company were wounded. Furious, Groza and Codreano wished to start firing; but Joakime prevented them, and brought in the horses. He ran about like a bear, a taper in his hand:

"You are lost if you answer them! To the pool! Quickly! I . . . I am going . . ."

Floritchica seized the cantor in her arms:

"Embrace me fiercely, Joakime! And farewell!"

The haïdoucs rushed to the water, each one trusting to his horse, his arms, and his luck. The tziganes and the other servants were sent to their tribe, which was saving itself better than we were. They mingled with the cattle, and howled all together.

The enemy dared not penetrate the house and take us by assault. Nevertheless, to parry a possible attack, our chiefs decided to be the last to leave.

Ah, the grievous thought that pierced my heart during that moment of waiting under the crackling fusillade which came upon us from all sides! I thought of my brother, the Roumanian militia man, the peas-

ant, for whose welfare we were flung into the throat of the wolf, and who was spitting death at us, with such submissiveness to Arghiropol and with such indifference to the fate of the haïdoucs.

I was of the race of men who break flint with their hands, who sleep on the snow as on a downy quilt, who crack olive pits in their jaws, and who wish to love all the beautiful girls in the world. I did not ask my neighbour to feed me, but neither would I be his donkey. I believe that this is dignity. What brotherhood was there, then, between that animal who was firing on us and myself, that I should sacrifice my glorious existence to him? Hate suddenly sent me to my knees, ready to fire into that pack of rascals. Floritchica, who was at my right, promptly stayed my hand.

"No . . . Do not fire unnecessarily! *He*, he is forced to do this. And, too, he is afraid. He is a thousand years behind you. Forgive him!"

Only about a dozen of our companions had succeeded in escaping, between the first fusillades concentrated on the pool. And there we were, anxious, crouching on the muddy slope which the house sheltered from bullets, when suddenly the firing stopped everywhere. Arghiropol demanded:

"What is happening?"

"It is a priest of Snagov, who says that the haïdoucs escaped yesterday evening!"

"Bring him here!"

The burning of the servants' houses had neither dissipated the fog nor by ever so little assisted in illuminating the grounds, but an opal area, sufficiently transparent, had formed there in spite of everything; and around it we saw unrecognizable shapes moving on foot and on horseback—surely the commanders.

It was there that the good Joakime found death.

While they led him on, groping, he intoned this psalm, and his voice, powerful with desperation, covered the sounds made by the haïdoucs in taking to the water:

"Eternal One! Hearken to my just cause! Be attentive to my cry! Incline Thine ear to the request which I address to Thee without any deceit on my lips!

"May my right be perceived in Thy presence, and Thine eyes gaze upon the justice of my cause. Thou hast sounded my heart; Thou hast visited it with darkness; Thou hast tested me, and found me wanting. My thoughts never go beyond my words. As for the actions of men, according to the words of Thy mouth, I have kept myself from the paths of the violent . . ."

"Don't shout so, madman!" yelled Arghirapol. "I can hear nothing else! What are you saying? What do you want?"

"Eternal One! Deliver me by Thy hand from these men, from the men of the world, whose heritage is of this world, and whose bellies Thou fillest with provision, until their children are satisfied and they leave the crumbs to their grandchildren. But I, I shall see Thy face in justice, and I shall be satiated with Thy likeness, when I shall be awakened."

"You idiotic priest! Shut up, and tell me quickly why you have come here?"

"I have come," said Joakime, and these were his last words, "I have come to acquaint you with this proverb of Solomon. He says:

" 'For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:

" 'For the servant when he reigneth . . . '

"That is the first of the four things which cause

the earth to tremble and which it cannot endure, and it is the only one which interests you: 'For the servant when he reigns'! Do you understand, Arghiropol? For the ciocoi servant like yourself, when he reigns . . . The earth trembles!"

There was a report. Floritchica wept. Then, whistles; then the fusilade was resumed, but we were already far away, in the ocean of mist, and in the cold water, which was up to our waists, and from which only the necks and shoulders of our horses emerged, their heads extending like the snouts of dragons.

A little later, while we followed the bluff, shivering horribly, a tall column of smoke, shot through the vermilion flames, rose straight toward the sky, above the house of the haïdoucs—in token that God, in his magnanimity, deigned to receive the passion of our sacrifices.

AFTER SNAGOV

At the Mercy of Fate

IN the month of April of that same year, after a long illness that almost bore her away, Floritchica entered our favourite woods of the Basca, singing at the top of her voice:

Hey, codrou, delightful foliage!
Let me pass through you,
With fourteen at my side:
I shall do you no harm!

Intoxication of a broken heart! . . . We had no reason for being so happy!

First, the health of the poor woman was compromised for ever; then, desertions had reduced the number of our haïdoucs to even less than the "fourteen" of her song. We were few indeed, for three captains, each of whom had counted about twenty guns on the morning of the Snagov disaster, which, however, had not cost us a single man, excepting for the voluntary sacrifice of Joakime.

But the greatest disaster of haïdouc existence is precisely that of wishing to spare the life of a haïdouc. Were life dear to him, he would not have preferred danger to enjoying it; and he who has finished breaking his soul upon the scorn of death, loses the equilibrium of life and can no longer make any concessions to it. He is a desperate man. All crusades are fought with desperate men, but crusades profit neither those who

fight, nor the cause for which they have gone to war; for the immemorially ancient tree of life cannot, more than any ordinary tree, give fruit when one burns it in order to destroy the caterpillars.

Floritchica, ever faithful to her maturely studied method, wished rather to utilize the caterpillar-destroyer of reason. She said to the haïdoucs:

"In your hate against the oppressor, you would be ready to set fire to the whole world, and consume yourselves at the same time. You are wrong in that. It is useless to wish to kill oneself, or to pass one's life in killing the lice on one's neighbour's body, when he will let them return to his body the moment your back is turned. Teach him, rather, to wash himself with his own hands. You will see that the lice will then perish of themselves."

She had had the time to speak to them at such length during her illness—an accursed inflammation of the lungs, which she had contracted during the night of our escape. We had taken refuge in a friendly sub-prefecture, where we passed the remainder of the winter, and where Floritchica was devotedly tended. Our companions, knowing her to be ill, listened to her deferentially, nodding their heads at her every word, and carefully concealing their real intentions. But the instant the first shoots appeared in the codrou, forty-four haïdoucs disappeared, one fine morning, without even bidding us farewell. They were off for brigandage, in the departments of the delta. I greatly missed one of the fugitives, a man of incredible violence, named Bouzdougan, whose crazy furies were always promptly quieted by his good nature. In addition, he was gifted with a fine voice, and knew like nobody else how to

draw miraculous melodies out of an acacia leaf. The young girls went mad about him. He was a really fine fellow, with a lofty contempt for money.

I was to meet him again, but in what sad circumstances!

We passed all the summer strolling along the Basca and through the Penteleu Mountains. Florit-chica was in soaring spirits, eagerly inhaling the pure air of the pines, and drinking fresh asses's milk. She followed closely the course of political events. She was now no more than the shadow of the captain who, at the head of a score of men, had descended from these same mountains five years before. Her fine body was completely broken. Her large, dark eyes, soft and caressing in the old days, were now filled with fever, and darted forth strange, flashing gleams.

For the first time since I knew her, I felt filial love rise in my heart. I grew passionately fond of her. Knowing that news from Bucharest procured her some moments of pleasure, I organized a service of special couriers to arrive twice daily with letters, sometimes from Miron, sometimes from the good Abbé Uhrich, and sometimes again from Couza himself. The reading of these, the meditations that succeeded them, and the brief answers which she made to them, filled her with joy.

"I have not much longer to live," she said, "but I at least have seen the realization of the commencement of the hope for which I have struggled through the past twenty years. The principalities are united under the rule of a man who will not do all he might wish to do, but everything that is in his power. Miron is his counsellor, and that is no small thing. Between them

both, they have enough decision to jostle the wavering and, if necessary, to ignore them. As for the rest, I have never dreamed of a terrestrial paradise!"

After Arghiropol's attack which had driven us from Snagov, Couza and Miron offered Floritchica, alone, the right of safe shelter in Bucharest. She refused to go there, being unwilling to run the risk of compromising, in a public scandal, the chief of the state and his prime minister, who were already accused by all the *ciocoi* of having been acquainted with our *hai-douc* plans and having been carried to power by bandits. The word *usurper*, by which those enriched servants designated Couza toward the end of his brief reign, had been hurled at him from the moment he mounted the throne.

The "usurper" took no account of this, but, knowing what was in store for him, worked day and night in the elaboration of the laws which were to inscribe his name among those of the most honest princes ever adored by a people in the course of the centuries. Ever shall be treasured, in the memories of our peasants, his famous appearance, in disguise, in taverns, market places, and village fairs, where, in the garb of a shepherd or a horse or cattle dealer, he came to convince himself in person of the way his laws were being applied. And then, while drinking with the inhabitants, he would ask to be served a *Couza oka*. Woe to the cheaters surprised with a small *oka* measure! In addition to the fine and imprisonment which he imposed, Couza, suddenly unbuttoning his threadbare *gheba* and revealing his princely tunic, began by delivering the culprit over to the ridicule of the whole village, forcing him to walk on all fours, with the false weight dang-

ling round his neck, from his shop to the mayor's office, where he was clapped into jail.

Just God! Where is the sensible man who would ask to do only what his own head counselled him, if the people were governed by such characters, whether they were princes, kings, emperors, or despots?

At the beginning of that September, Couza came, accompanied by Miron, to visit us secretly in our retreat.

We were then at Lopatari, the sudden cold having obliged Floritchica to leave the high Penteleu Mountains and to seek a temporary shelter in the hospitable dwelling of Father Manole, the friendly tavern keeper who, with his son, lead the existence of a jovial bear, on the outskirts of a terrifying wood. It was possible for him to put us all up, for now we counted no more than five heads: Floritchica, Groza, Ely, Movila, and myself. Codreano and Spilca, accompanied by five other haïdoucs, had wished at all costs to wreak a vengeance which lay close to their hearts. They had left in June, and, encountering a potera at Dragosloveni, were slain to the last man. Trasnila was not there. This giant, after wearing himself out in hunting and setting traps all over the mountains, had succeeded in capturing a fine bear cub, which he tamed with much skill and without brutalizing the animal. Then they both, one almost as gay as the other, had gone out into the world to earn their bread, the man making the beast dance, and life making the man dance.

Floritchica had been affected by Trasnila's departure more than by the loss of any of the others.

She loved the strength and the good humour of the tzigane:

"Every time he spoke to me, I felt as full of life as he himself!" she said to us, on the day of the Prince's arrival, as she looked out of her room at the autumnal foliage of the beeches.

The cadaverous aspect of her face greatly affected our two friends. They had not seen her since the day at Galatz, when, as we separated, she had counselled Couza to beware of the defenses of the boars. To eradicate their painful impression, she returned to this pleasantry.

"You have now to deal with boars which are dangerous in a different manner! Poor friend! Now you are wrestling with the ciocoi, the enemies whom you have most scorned. I am sorry for you, but it is your task. It is just beginning. Mine, happily, is finished!"

Couza and Miron, dressed like plain citizens of the middle class, remained seated on their stools and seemed to be reflecting more on her sad state than on her words. The Prince chided her:

"I am distressed at not having visited you the moment you fell ill. I would have had you taken by force to a hospital in Switzerland. Miron did not tell me that your illness was so serious."

"I did not know it myself," the other said, in his own defense. "In her letters, she wrote only of having taken cold. I am inclined to believe that she loves us less since January 24th."

"On the contrary, I wished to leave you to your work, to prevent quite possible slander, and perhaps, a grave political disaster. You are men of state. I—I am an outlaw!"

"It is not my part to defend you before the law which is in the penal code; but before that of my conscience, I am free to act as I wish!" Couza replied.

"Under no circumstances," Floritchica said, "would I have consented to leave the country during a time when my thirst for news was so great. And then, I have always believed that I shall end my days in the codrou. There are only two kinds of tombs worthy of enclosing generous hearts—oceans and thickets."

Father Manole, sprucely attired in his national costume, in his shirt sleeves, but with his shirt as white as snow, entered with an oka of wine, some smoked bacon, and bread, placed them on a table, filled the glasses, started to say something, and grew confused.

"What is the matter, Manole?" Couza asked.

"The matter is, Sire, that the guides who led you here have not been able to keep their mouths shut!"

"That is nothing to worry about."

"We thank you for your indulgence, but all the same, you will be annoyed."

"What do you mean?"

"Father Ion is outside. You understand? Father Ion, our last razeche—the old man of Lopatari. He is there with a son, a grandson, and a great-grandson."

"Have them enter."

The four haïdoucs entered, tall as oaks, their hearts on their lips, their consciences in their eyes. Lifting their bonnets from heads that ranged from golden brown to silver white, they cried in one voice:

"Long may you live, Sire!"

"We thank you for that wish. May you all live long, as well!"

And Couza went to grasp their hands. Then, still standing, he said:

"Speak, Father Ion!"

The old man raised his eyes. His speech was as clear as his sight.

"Sire, I am a descendant of honest men. My father took care not even to do wrong to a dog. That is the whole heritage of which I am proud. Yet, here I am, at ninety-two, slapped in the face by a boyar, not a real boyar, but one who has become a ciocoi since servility has come into style. The man who hit me on the cheek is our proprietor, and holds a seat in the Council of the country. A month ago, I went to complain to him of a theft committed against me by his foreman, and he slapped me. Sire, I ask justice of you!"

Couza advanced a step, took the head of the razeah in his hands, and kissed both his cheeks:

"There where the ciocoi struck you, the Prince of the country kisses and washes away the outrage!"

"That, Father Ion, is all the justice that I can do against those locusts that will soon be stronger than myself and than justice itself!"

"May you be in good health, Sire!"

"Go in good health, my friends!"

Toward the end of the day, Couza and Miron rose to depart. The son of the tavern keeper timidly approached the Prince:

"Sire, since I shall not twice during my lifetime encounter a man like Your Highness, I should like to be enlightened upon a matter that troubles me."

"What is it?"

"This: by what I have heard from our elders and what I lived through myself, in the Crimean War, I understood that the great powers have always fought with one another for the possession of weaker nations, like ours, which they crush, each in their turn. But the crushed nations notwithstanding do not die, and we Roumanians are proof of that fact. And the great powers, like Russia and Turkey in the last war, are

content, in the end, to find themselves again where they were before they started to fight. Why, then, do they fight?"

Couza reflected an instant; then, he said:

"My lad, you embarrass me. I shall try to extricate myself by answering that the great powers act like those two men who ate a toad. Do you know the story?"

"No, Sire, I do not know it. . . ."

"Then, listen! One fine morning, two peasants left their village to go to the market of a big town. One took a calf which he wished to sell. The other had only his arms, which he did not know what to do with. Passing a pond, the man with the calf, who was a foolish creature, said to his travelling companion, as he pointed to a disgusting toad:

"'Look! If you eat that toad, I will give you my calf. It will then be yours!'

"Fools love to make dares, and they always pick on the most foolish of their kind, who take the challenge on the wing. His companion, a lazy body who lived from hand to mouth, thought: 'It must be frightful to eat a living toad; one does not even eat them cooked. But then, a calf—that makes it worth while!' And, seizing the toad, he said to the first fool:

"'You will give me the calf at once?'

"'The instant you finish eating the toad!'

"The other took a bite, chewed quickly, and quickly tossed it down; but his heart was not in the business. 'It will be hard work, by God!' At the second mouthful, he thought he was vomiting out his entrails, and, perspiring with disgust, sat down on the grass.

"Seeing him almost halfway through the toad, the proprietor of the calf bethought himself:

“ ‘He is doing it, all right! He will eat it, and then I shall have lost my calf!’ And he, in turn, sweated. But the eater, after a third piece of toad, was at the end of his endurance, and made the following reflection: ‘No, I shan’t be able to finish it; but if I throw away the rest, he will scoff at me and that is all that I will have for my trouble.’

“ ‘You know, old fellow,’ he remarked. ‘If you will eat the other half of the toad, why, I’ll let you keep your cow.’

“The pitiful instigator seemed only to be waiting for that word.

“ ‘As you wish, my friend. If that is how you put it, I accept.’

“And he had to swallow the remainder, with the same disgust. Then the two fools continued their journey, vomiting all along the road—one leading his calf, the other now knowing what to do with his arms, in just the same condition as they had been before they had shared the toad.”

After the departure of our two friends, Floarea Codrilor could say farewell to the domnitza of Snagov before taking leave of her own life. No one knew when, but it could easily be seen that it was so decreed; for to the very end, she refused to accept the necessary treatment and a secure refuge outside of the Roumanian woods.

She even wished to pass the winter with Father Manole, who did everything in his power so that his patient might lack for nothing; and we were beginning to be settled when, one cold, rainy October day, we were warned that Arghiropol was climbing up with a potera to arrest us.

"Well," said Floritchica, "we will go . . . The Roumanian land is vast."

Yes, the Roumanian land was vast; but for us, it was beginning to contract. The Dark Valley and its Bear Cave, which had seen us arrive, six years earlier, on a similar October day, again offered shelter; but a hard shelter, and one unthinkable for a sick person.

Three mules were loaded with everything necessary to furnish the two cabins which we proposed to build, one for the dying woman and one for us, the four men. We were all sad at heart. Sad, too, were the horses. Floritchica, on horseback, seemed like a spectre of resignation.

At the moment of departure, the good tavern keeper took her two hands, lifted them to his lips, and burst into tears:

"You wished good to the world, and the world wounds you from all sides!"

"That is justice, Father Manole! I, too, have hunted, and hunted some out of life itself!"

And she rode to the head of our victorious but lamentable cavalcade, murmuring, her gaze fixed on the misty peaks of the mountains:

"Perhaps up there is still the single place where man may remain good!"

These words, the last which were to issue from her mouth, were followed by two hours of uninterrupted climbing, gloomy and silent, during which we felt as if we were a thousand leagues from one another; then, when the convoy was crossing the Basca River, we saw Floritchica waver upon her mount and fall into the turbid water, without a cry.

We leaped into the stony bed of the torrent. I

raised her and carried her to the bank, passionately clasping her against my breast; but I was clasping a heart that had ceased to beat. A bit of pink froth issued from the corners of her blue lips.

I interred my mother by the root of a great old fir, on the trunk of which I cut a cross, the symbol of the suffering of men and of pity for the fate which they fashion for themselves with their own hands.

One of our sayings has it that the monkey, when he grows old, will become a monk. It is not much of a haïdouc custom to make old bones, but when the star of his outlawry sets for ever—as often happens—the haïdouc turns shepherd.

That is what happened to us, and we turned shepherd, all the four of us—Groza, Ely, Movila, and myself. We had established, on the Transylvanian slope of the Carpathians, a little sheep-fold, with few sheep and still less care, but with many, oh, with many distressing memories.

Groza savoured their sweet bitterness as he dragged his now heavy limbs to the sunshine in summer, to the fire in winter. Ely and Movila, more in control of their hearts, followed the herds about the pastures, playing the flute, and took upon themselves every task connected with the sheepfold, while I—ah, wretched human soul!—I mounted to the summit of the Penteleu, and cried out to her who reposed by the fir root marked with a cross:

“Oh, Floritchica, pretty mother mine. It is not true that they are better, the men who live in the joyous desert of the mountains! And even though it were true, I would have none of their goodness, oh, my brave domnitza of Snagov! They have left the world

because they have nothing to give to the world. They endure solitude, because solitude does not disturb them. They are silent, because they have nothing to say. For them, the forest means firewood; the impetuous torrent, water to wash their shirts; the rock which dominates the abyss, an immense and useless pebble. Again I wish to tell you, my generous friend, that their first thought, at the sight of a man clambering in summer time up to their refuge, is to take him for a malefactor!"

It was also our chance, one July afternoon, to welcome a man who had clambered up to our sheep-fold. He was bleeding copiously from a big hole which a shower of lead had made in his back, and we understood by this token that he was a wrong-doer who had been shot by a well-doer. Two companions, as disreputable as himself, helped him to drag his legs, one hand placed on the wound which they had stanchd with burned rags.

"Christians!" he groaned, "whoever you may be! I yield myself to you, but give me something to drink! I suffer from thirst more than from my wound. For three hours, I have been climbing, without coming upon a single drop of water."

The man supplicating us in this fashion was Mandreano, the famous church robber, whom we knew by name. The breach opened by the hail of fire above his loins was such that one wondered how he had been able to keep alive and to march for half a day. He drank, entered upon the death agony, and delivered up his soul during the night. His body, squat and heavy as lead, went to rot behind our fold.

The history of this man was more amusing than tragic. He had never killed, nor wounded, nor even

carried a fire-arm; and had it not been for the threat of his seven year military service, which he dreaded, he would never have come into conflict with the authorities of his native village. But alas! His youth was poisoned by the cursed arcan.⁴⁶ And since he ran away to the mountains, with the young men of his community, at every annual recurrence of the arcan, it finally came about that he returned no more except to steal. His victims were only the saints, whom he despoiled of their vestments of gold and silver. He was a locksmith by trade; the doors of the houses of the Lord could not resist him. As for the martyrs of the Christian faith, we know that they have always suffered passively.

Mandreano never had companions, nor felt the need of any. He lived his life alone, but one day, destiny offered him two companions, and such companions! These were the same who had come, bringing him half dead to us, and who related to us the vicissitudes of their enforced sojourn in haïdouc-land.

"We were soldiers for a year, and were part of the guard of a prison, when Mandreano was brought in. He was sentenced and condemned to ten years in the hulks. We two were chosen to transport him the entire journey; and we left gladly, for one is always glad, in the first place, to go through the country, and then, Mandreano was a fine talker who had amused all the guards during his two months in prison. He amused us even more on the way, with his stories of churches, priests, and the holy jewels he had pilfered:

" 'Why, to be sure,' he said, 'the saints I robbed would wish me no harm, for in their time on earth they

⁴⁶ Forcible recruiting, which took the form of a man-hunt with ropes.

lived in rags and cursed the rich for arraying themselves with ornaments. Well, then? Wherein is my crime?’

“And he asked us to loosen a little the heavy irons on his hands and feet. We thought: ‘The poor fellow, they must hurt him! Well, then, let us free one hand and one foot. We are two, and we each have a gun. How can he escape us?’ And we half freed him. He behaved himself well. On the road, all the tavern keepers knew him. We ate and drank . . . and removed his chains, which we wound round his neck. Then, feeling rather good, we made a halt in a maize field and lit our cigarettes, throwing our guns on the grass. Now we were three fine comrades; but he was still Mandreano, and he quickly seized our guns and backed away:

“ ‘You are joking, Mandreano!’ we cried to him.

“ ‘Not at all, my friends! I am leaving you!’

“ ‘That is bad for us! Brother! You would not wish to see us rot in prison!’

“ ‘Certainly not! That would give me no pleasure at all!’

“ ‘Then . . .’

“ ‘Then . . . come with me! What churches there are! I will teach you the trade!’

“Well, then, we had another drink and left with him, and it was just a year ago this month. He never asked us to steal, but we always acted as his watch, and the money was always divided fairly into three equal parts. He was an honest man and a fine comrade. Now that he is dead, we do not know what to do.”

It was a peasant who, surprising Mandreano in the act of stripping a church, had shot him in the back,

with the gun almost against him, and had sounded the alarm; but the fugitives had succeeded in eluding their pursuers.

We offered the "two widowers," as Groza nicknamed them, a means of livelihood in doing the chores round our little farm. They had come opportunely, for if Movila showed himself to be a good shepherd, Ely was only tolerable, and Groza and I were of no account at all. One does not love the whole earth and all of life with impunity. One does not feel one's breast seething with passion, love, and hate, and one's eyes ever athirst for visions, only to remain for ever rooted to the same corner of the world, however fair that corner may be.

At the end of five years of patience and heart-rending nostalgia, the sheep we sheared and the horizons which we had seen too often disgusted us, and we decided to leave Movila, one wonderful day in the month of May, 1864. Then Ely, who was not a wise man for nothing, made this sagacious observation:

"We know what we are forsaking, but we do not know what awaits us. Only God knows that!"

God . . .

Our enemies knew it, too; for they were still searching everywhere for us. And perhaps two simple-hearted women knew it still better. Fate placed them in our path, the day we had sold our flock of sheep at the Slobozia market, and then had gone to ask hospitality at their inn, situated in the environs of that community.

There was no trap. Not even bad intentions. But although there had been a hundred traps, set with a thousand bad intentions, we should have fallen into

them, hand and foot, like blind men or deaf mutes, so filled were our hearts with joy when, upon reaching the valleys and the Wallachian plains after five years of absence, we learned that Couza had surpassed the hopes which the Roumanian people had reposed in him after his election. He had created vast peasant estates, secularized the ecclesiastical lands, purged the administration of all its corrupt elements, and endowed the country with a constitution modeled upon that of Belgium.

Oh, the happiness of discovering a good and incorruptible man, no matter where he may be! Ten centuries of evil cannot prevail completely to destroy the faith that a single lustrum of justice can nourish in the heart of a people. Where are they, the honest governors? Here are a hundred nations ready to obey them!

We allowed ourselves to become as tipsy as inveterate drunkards, and discovered that Lina, the keeper of the inn, and her daughter Maritza were creatures who would come at least half-way to satisfy our long repressed desires. We had had five years of confinement, at an altitude of four thousand feet! Although in her fortieth year, Lina had breasts and hips as firm as those of her daughter, cheeks that you could have cut with a wisp of hair, and did not at all like to be called "mother," but *tzatza*.⁴⁷ Groza quickly grew enamoured of her short white petticoat, starched and faultlessly clean, of which the over-skirt, suspended very high, permitted an ample view. In my turn, I fell madly in love with the brilliant eyes of Maritza, who was herself no novice in the arts of love. Ely contented himself with remarking:

⁴⁷ The popular term of courtesy for an older person.

"Be careful! These women are stupid, and stupidity, even more than intelligence, gets one into deep water!"

They, stupid? Faith, so much the worse for the intelligence that would keep two eager haïdoucs in suspense! We preferred to intelligence that poverty of spirit which comforted so delightfully. Besides, Tzatza Lina was an ardent Couzist, praised the work of the great Prince, and, as she served those who entered her inn, cried out: "Long live Couza!" It was that trait, moreover, which made her sympathetic to us and which helped us to win the hearts of these two women, for, my head turned equally by passion and good wine, I confided one evening to Maritza who we were and what the election of our idol had cost us.

Vanity, thou are the cause of all the evil that befalls men! And it was Ely who, once again, was right.

Not at once, but stupidity never misses an opportunity, except to prove all the better, on the next occasion, how infinite is its sway. So, we had at least the leisure to enjoy for two months that happiness which it is difficult to encounter in the wastes of the mountains, and to get drunk and sing on moonlight nights:

Come, Lina, let us pass over the Oltou!

Let us change our speech and dress.

Let us live like lovers,

And tell the world that we are kin!

One Sunday, toward the end of June, Tzatza Lina's inn was filled with a most variegated crowd: peasants, cowherds, shepherds, priests, officers, and even a sub-prefect. Many friends of Couza were there, and many enemies, as well. The innkeeper, more than ordinarily delighted at having such a concourse of

people, amused her patrons by recounting this story of the Prince:

"One day, Couza went to inspect a small provincial prison. The director lined up his prisoners in the courtyard—about a dozen rascals, most of them merchants, condemned for fraudulent practices. The Prince began to question them:

" 'What did you do?'

" 'Nothing, Sire!'

" 'So! And you?'

" 'Nothing, I swear it!'

" 'Well, well!'

" 'Tell us your crime!'

" 'I committed none!'

" 'And yours?'

" 'I also am innocent!'

"The same answers were received from one end of the line to the other, until Couza reached the last prisoner:

" 'And you? What did you do?'

" 'I stole, Sire!'

" 'You stole?'

" 'Yes—two hens!'

" 'And what are you doing here, among all these honest fellows? Clear out, scamp!'

"And he ordered the director:

" 'Throw that man out at once!'

Both the friends and enemies of Couza laughed together at this prank attributed to the man who, at the moment, was at once the most beloved and the most detested in all Roumania.

Yes, they laughed, and the landlady beamed with happiness; but her stupidity was only waiting for this moment to develop and spread out like a cabbage under

the very nose of the sub-prefect. For, as she glided behind the bench where we three were seated, Tzatzalina exhibited us to her patrons and proudly said, tapping us on the shoulders:

"Ah, we must believe it, Couza is a man! But if we now have him at the head of our nation, we owe it to haïdoucs, like these fellows!"

"There, she has ruined everything!" Groza murmured. "She has let it out!"

Ely began to whistle, scratching himself under his bonnet.

The sub-prefect did not whistle, but suddenly cried:

"Get them, children!"

The "children" numbered, as if by chance, just one half of the patrons assembled. Nothing distinguished them from the regular habitués of the inn—the peasants, cowherds, shepherds, priests, and officers—but they were none the less authentic poteri, brought there as the sequel of an adroit plot to prove to Tzatzalina and ourselves that Couza was not everything in the country.

Without arms or horses, we could do nothing, in the face of the twelve pistols which were shoved against our breasts, but let ourselves be pinioned—to the great despair of the hostesses, who howled and struggled to help us.

Their intentions were good. There had been no trap. Not even malice. But the stupidity of simple souls does more damage than the intrigues of the mischievous. Vanity and intoxicating joy will take care of the rest.

We were led to the Slobozia prison, where we passed the night.

Early the next day, Lina was in the courtyard of the prison, crying out like a crazy person:

"I will sell my last shirt, but I'll get you out of this! Ah, damned ciocoi, I'll show you! I'll . . ."

The police put our hands and feet in irons, to transport us to the county-seat of the province. They looked impudently at the innkeeper, and taunted her:

"The damned haïdoucs! All the innkeepers love them!"

The convoy got under way at sunrise, and soon the heat became suffocating. It was a season of drought. Not a drop of water had fallen for almost two months. The plantations, roasted, were quite hopeless. Only the maize could grow up again and partly compensate the peasant, if a good downpour came in time. That explained the continuous processions with banners, ikons, incense, and relics.

We encountered one of these masquerades on our way. It was quite triumphal, for, in fact, toward noon, a torrential rain poured down upon human stupidity and on our poor bodies, burning with the combined mud, dust, and sweat.

The procession passed us as, escorted by six armed men on horseback, we dragged lamentably our bleeding feet, heavy irons, and ungrateful destiny. The priests, at their head, howled their prayers of thanksgiving. They passed, and as they passed they tried to wither us with their looks. The throng that followed them, the scum of holy and lovely terrestrial life, did better than the priests, for as they passed us, they murmured:

"Bandits! Murderers!"

Groza burst forth:

"No, in the blessed name of God! We are not

bandits or murderers! We are haïdoucs! Animals! Riffraff! It is fortunate for me that I have never counted on your support, for otherwise, I should have something to make my heart more sore!"

The berated processionists lowered their heads. The cortege, chanting litanies, passed on.

More than a year and a half had passed since the day of our arrest, and we were still languishing in irons, each one of us isolated in a damp cell, without having been judged, without knowing the fate awaiting us. Investigations were under way, and on our heads were being heaped all the crimes and robberies whose authors had remained unknown for twenty years.

Groza, who had been reduced to a shapeless mass of humanity, could no longer open his eyes. The second winter released him of suffering, and he went to report to the domnitza of Snagov that our struggles had not been in vain, and that at least Couza had proved himself worthy of the confidence of the haïdoucs.

He was removed from his irons, one gloomy morning in the middle of December, and Ely and myself were permitted to gaze upon him for the last time in the penitentiary yard, where he had been spread out, his face upwards. Peasants, who had come hither to sell their products to the inmates, surrounded the lifeless body of the unconquerable haïdouc and were praying, when one of them, an aged, mild looking man, lifted his bonnet and boldly said:

"Brothers, Christians! Do you see that man? Without the help that he once lent me, I should have been dead long since. Ten years ago, the best and bravest of my three sons was wrested from me at the arcan. During the seven years of his military service, I could

not count on the help of any one, for his brothers were thankless wretches. So, old and ill, I was perishing alone in my hut, when, one day, I met this man—may God pardon all his sins!—and he asked me to tell him the tale of my misfortunes. I recounted my distress. In fact, he had come to bring me help. He had heard, from the townsfolk, of a poor old man who lived, abandoned, a little above the village, in the wood; and that very day he put into my hand the wherewithal to live a whole year. He came twice each year, all the time that my son was kept away from me by his accursed service. Each time, he gave me money—more than I needed, so that I could send some to the poor soldier. And, one summer, this benefactor came accompanied by thirty of his fellows. They demolished my ramshackle cabin, and built me a new one in a single day. Now, I find him here. May the doors of heaven be open to him!”

The old man ran to the canteen and returned with a little taper, which he lit and placed beside the head of the dead man. Then he knelt and kissed the right hand placed across the breast.

The same day that Groza was interred, while my heart was sorely distressed over his sad end, it was given me to experience a queer sort of joy. Queer, because, if we always delight in being found by a good friend, it is yet not so pleasant to see him come through the doors of a prison. Still, I was glad again to see the brave Bouzdougan, the companion of the happy days of yore, the gay player who knew how to astonish the young women with an acacia leaf, and who had left us after the Snagov disaster to go plundering, God knows where. He it was who was now brought to us, as jolly as ever, although in irons.

"Ah, you are here!" he cried, in the presence of his guards, throwing himself wearily on the ground of the courtyard.

"You will soon be free. Lina told me that, a month ago . . ."

We had to go back to our cells. But what horrible days, what sleepless nights I had to pass, continually ruminating on that hope—that we should soon be free! How much of that statement of the innkeeper was true? What could the poor wretch know?

Were we to be acquitted? It was madness even to think of it. Was she thinking of attacking the prison with an army of imaginary *haïdoucs*, and delivering us, as in the tales?

I exhausted myself with conjectures, especially at night, my eyes piercing the darkness, while the sentinels cried out in turn:

"Number One! All is well!"

Two weeks of anguish followed the death of Groza; then, on the first day of January, 1866, the door of my cell opened. Ely entered, and with him, a man who was the new warden of the penitentiary, arrived that same evening, and in whom I recognized a young Couzist boyar, an old friend from Snagov.

He clasped our hands and said, in a low voice:

"You will escape from here, as soon as I have found a guard whom I can trust. That will be in several days. We will arrange a little escape that will keep up appearances. Then I will resign. I am sent by Couza to save you from the life imprisonment which is being planned for you by the *ciocoi*. For you must know that the throne of our friend is quite shaky. He will not be left upon it for long, now. It is only a question of weeks."

I said to him:

"There is another man whom you ought to let escape with us—Bouzdougan."

"Bouzdougan is not a haïdouc."

"Yes! He fought beside us, under the orders of Floritchica. Since then, he has given himself up to brigandage, but through despair."

"Well, then, the three of you shall go. And you will have five days in which to secrete yourselves, after which I will declare that you escaped. Then you must look out for yourselves. Even God himself will not be able to help you, if you are captured again!"

One night of storm, wind, and snow, we left the prison, dressed as mountain peasants, our heads concealed in enormous bonnets, and each one armed with a gun which he carried under his fur clothing.

The frost made the stones crackle. In the sinister waste, we heard wolves barking, far off. The earth stretched before us, hostile and menacing, ready to swallow us up.

Never had life appeared so beautiful!

But, Good God! why does not the earth open of itself to engulf the selfish, good-for-nothing man?

That is what I thought, on the terrible winter day when—three poor fugitives, half dead of cold—we reached the haïdouc sheepfold in Transylvania and were received by an ugly, niggardly, avaricious Movila.

O world! You do not wound me, when you are ugly. It is your right, and you exercise it nine times out of ten. But when you go extending your ugliness over the tenth part of life—then, no! This fraction belongs to me; you must evacuate it! It has the right to live!

Movila! Movila! Is this what you asked of life?

To have a thousand sheep to shear and milk? Ten farm hands, meagrely paid? A fat belly, a fat neck, a dowered spouse, papers in order, and yourself a big batch?⁴⁸ So it was, in your opinion, cheese, mutton, and wool that the world most lacked! But what in the devil's name, then, were you doing as a haïdouc, and why did you not always function thus in a society which gives free scope to the Movilas who ask nothing more of life than to be big batches?

Toward the beginning of April, we left the accursed farm and the Translyanian side, to return to Roumania. During February, a military coup d'etat had overthrown Couza. The ciocoi were masters of the country. No more were the boyars all-powerful, but their servants—which was so much the worse! And the valley of the Basca was already resounding with the new haïdouc song:

Green leaf of the apple tree!
I dream in the midst of the road:
What shall I do? At what shall I work?
To earn my bread and feed my children?
Wherever I go and whatever I do,
The ciocoi pursue me.
The fear of the sub-prefect
And the terror of the taxes
Have made me forget the path to the village
And the handles of the plow!
I have taken the path to the wood,
The road to the codrou,
And the musket of the haïdouc!
For it is better to go as a haïdouc,

⁴⁸ Cheese merchant.

Than to live in constraint:
May all fall out as God wills!

We found ourselves beside the grave of Floritchica, and I cried out:

"Domnitza of Snagov! Do you hear the uproar? We came from the mountains, where man remains as God made him; and here in the valley, everything must begin all over. Thirteen years ago, in this very spot where your bones now rest, we listened to the legend of Gheorghitza the haïdouc, and you said that 'in this world, everything ends in a haïdouc song.' Yes, everything ends, but then, too, everything begins in a haïdouc song—and that is life!"

Bouzdougan went to fetch wine from a nearby village. Ely stretched himself out in the shadow of Floritchica's pine. Of late, our wise old man had ceased to talk much, having retired within himself. He had greatly aged, and hardly took any food to nourish himself.

I left him to search for a little dry wood, for we had some sheep's meat to grill. I was only fifty paces away when, suddenly, a report broke the silence and rooted me to the spot. Everything passed through my head, except the idea of the suicide of a man who had never in his life despaired.

Nevertheless, I retraced my steps, telling myself: "Surely, Ely fired the shot by accident!"

No, the shot was not fired by accident, for I found him, his skull opened and himself unconscious, with his rifle in his arms.

From afar, Bouzdougan came up, playing on an acacia leaf, two gourds of wine hanging from the end

of his dangling arms. I went to meet him, threw myself upon his neck, and cried out:

“Brother Bouzdougan, now we are alone! But we are both young and good. We will go together, to scatter through the world the best of our youth and goodness!”

PANAÏT ISTRATI, the son of a Greek smuggler and a Roumanian peasant woman, began to write after an unsuccessful attempt at suicide. It was Romain Rolland who "discovered" him, and Istrati has on numerous occasions acknowledged his debt to the great Frenchman. Kyra Kyralina, tinged with the atmosphere of Orientalism, earned him the appellation of the "traditional Eastern story teller;" his later work, however, and particularly *Les Haïdoucs* (originally published in two volumes, *Présentation des Haïdoucs* and *Domnita de Snagov*), is absolutely characteristic of his native land, and although he writes in French, a language foreign to him, his stories and novels exhibit an authentic folk-quality rare in any modern literature.



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